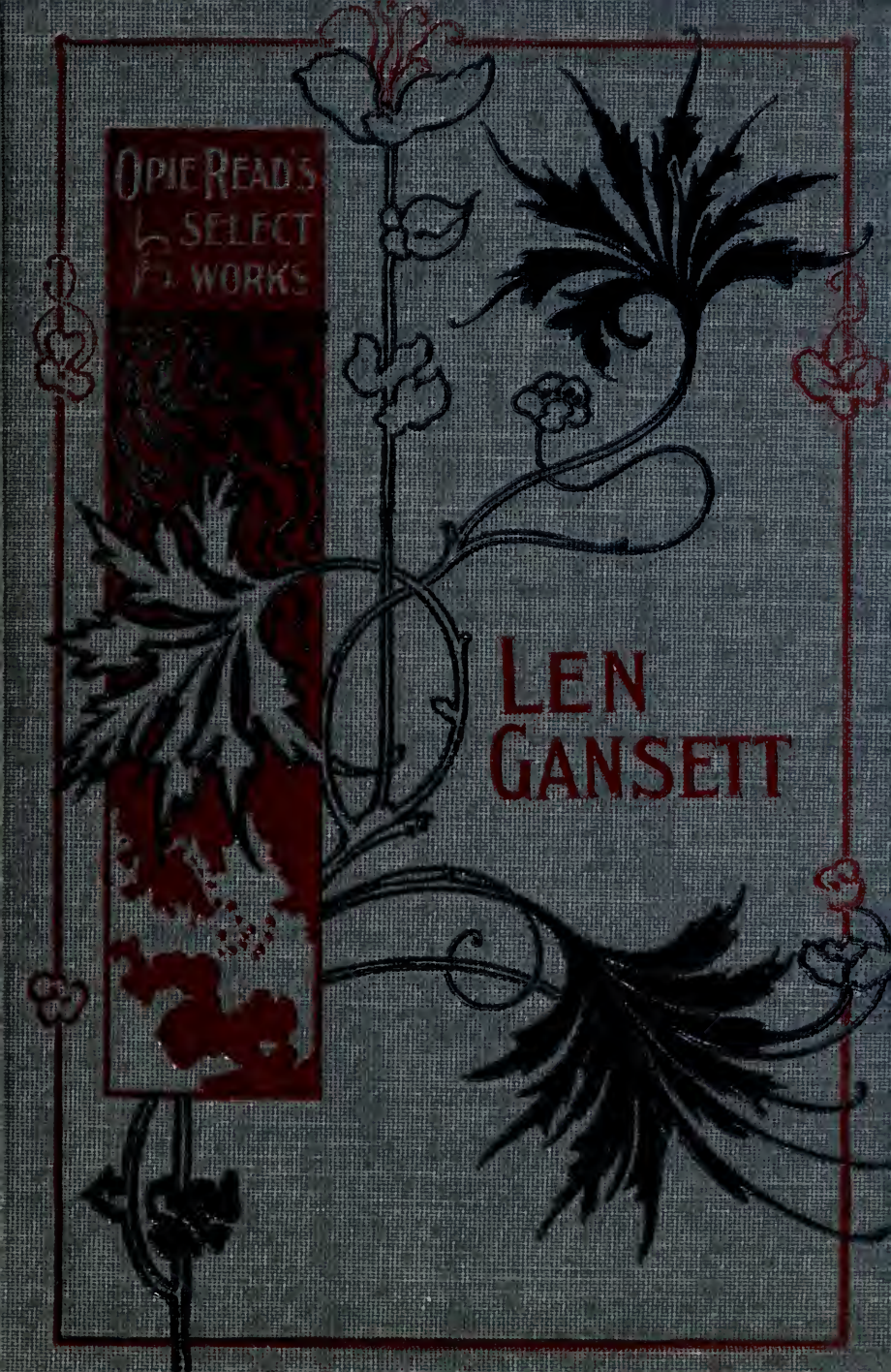


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LEN GANSETT

A NOVEL

BY
OPIE READ

Author of "The Starbucks," "The Carpetbagger," "Old
Ebenezer," "The Jucklins," "My Young Master," "On
the Suwanee River," "A Tennessee Judge," "A
Kentucky Colonel," "Emmett Bonlore,"
"The Wives of the Prophet," "The
Colossus," "The Tear in the
Cup and Other Stories,"



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PREFACE

TO THE 105th THOUSAND

This book was written when a certain neighborhood was fresh in mind. And there is one little incident that sustains me in the belief that in the delineation of these characters I must have hit upon the element of truth. One afternoon, not long ago, I was sitting beneath a tree in the neighborhood where these scenes are laid, talking to an old justice of the peace. Presently he said:

"By the way, yonder comes old man Gentry. The other day I gave him that *Len Gansett* book and told him to take it home and let his wife read it to him — can't read himself. Now we'll hear what he's got to say about it."

The old man came along, driving a mule and a red steer hitched to a wagon, and when he was abreast of us, the justice spoke to him.

"Howdy Mr. Gentry."

"Whoa—hor, come yere Buck. W'y howdy, 'Squire,"

"Take that book home with you?"

"Yep."

"Your wife read it to you?"

"Ah, hah."

"What do you think of it?"

The old man scratched his head. "W'y, 'Squire, that ain't no book at all. I've hearn folks talk thatter way all my life."

It was better than a thousand words from a recognized critic.

Opie Read

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LEN GANSETT.

I.

"WELL," how're you pleased with the place by this time?" remarked old Bob Gansett, addressing his grandson, who, a few days before, had arrived in the neighborhood of Abbott's Ford.

"I am very much pleased."

"Ah, hah, I s'pose so. What do you say your fust name is?"

"Now, pap," interposed old Mrs. Gansett, "I don't want you to torment the child. You know his name's Lenqubees, an' what makes you want to keep on a-askin' an' a-askin' o' him?"

The old man's eyes winked with merriment. "Lenqubees," he repeated. Well, I'll swear! Lenqubees! Well, I hope it won't result in nothin' bad. How old are you?"

"I am going on twenty-two."

"Had that name all the time?"

"Of course I have."

"I didn't know. Didn't know you could stand it that long."

Again the old lady remonstrated. "You know very well when he was named," she said; "know it as well as I do, every bit an' grain."

"Oh, I mout o' heard something about it, Sarah; but it passed out o' my mind."

"I am sorry," said the young man, with an air of annoyance, "that you are so much exercised over my name. It is the name which my father—your son—gave me."

"That may be true," old Bob replied; "but Hildenroy never did have good jedgment."

"Hildenroy," repeated young Gansett. The two men looked at each other and laughed. Then the old man acknowledged that he had bestowed upon his son the name of Hildenroy, and after an argument in which he exhibited much tact, he agreed that the name had an odd sound; but even after this he continued to repeat the name of his grandson as though it had taken possession of him.

The neighborhood of Abbott's Ford is situated in one of the northern counties of Arkansas. Six Points river, which runs through the neighborhood, is fordable at any place, and why any ford should be specially designated is beyond the power of any man to make clear. The neighborhood of Abbott's Ford is not a wild section of country. Many of its farm-houses are moss-grown, and many of its fields, long since worn, by succession of corn crops, into sterility, have been thrown out to grow up in persimmon and sassafras bushes. The people have never held education in high esteem. They argued, many of them, that education had been largely instrumental in causing the war, and that they would rather be ignorant and contented than to be educated and unhappy. Schools, however, were not wholly un-

known in the neighborhood of Abbott's Ford, for "readin', 'ritin', an' 'rithmetic" were, during three months of the year, taught in the Ebenezer meeting-house. The higher branches of learning were condemned, and grammar was looked upon with especial disfavor. The circuit rider, at the time to which this story relates, was a man of great importance; and to him many good people looked for information, not alone that which concerned their soul's, but, in great part, the gossip of the neighborhood. He was a kind of newsletter. He prayed earnestly, and ate with vigor and relish. He sang lustily, and, with marked pertinacity, insisted that his meagre salary should be paid.

Robert Gansett and his wife, while they were both young, settled in the Abbott's Ford neighborhood, having come from Tennessee. Old Bob, as nearly every one called him, was a man of good sense, but of little education. While a young man he possessed a passion for horse-racing, and when he became old, although he had long since allied his speculative destinies with those of a church, there was still about him a perceptible fondness for spirited horse-flesh. His temper, humorously equable, rendered him an agreeable companion. He was quizzical and prankish; he was kind-hearted and generous. The wild bursts of laughter which had characterized him in youth had settled down into a smile and hearty chuckle, which characterized him now that the noon of life was long since past. His beard was bushy and iron-gray; his mouth, when in repose, indicated strength of purpose, and his eyes had the

effect of making one believe that their owner was speaking the truth.

Mrs. Gansett, borrowing an expression often used by the neighbors, was as good an old soul as ever lived. With tenderness she cared for the afflicted, and she knew that every one who died was better off. Life to her was merely a season during which to prepare for death. Often during revivals she would shout as though her quart cup of great joy were overflowing; and without her presence the mourner's bench seemed to languish. The preachers may have been the lamp, and the exhorters may have been the wick, but she was the oil.

Len Gansett had come to live with his grand-parents. His father and mother were dead. The young man was tall and strong, was well educated, but did not appear to be especially fitted for anything. He was not an idle dreamer, but his fondness for reading novels was much more pronounced than his disposition to perform any kind of labor. He had lived in New Orleans, had "roughed it" with cowboys in Texas, and he had stood behind the counter of a St. Louis dollar-store. He had not long been connected with the establishment when the proprietor called him one day and said:—

"Gansett, you don't seem to get the hang of things."

"I am afraid that I don't."

"You are afraid so? Why, confound it! you don't try. This morning I noticed that you kept a book behind the counter, and that you paid more attention to it than to my customers. Can't stand that, Gansett. Guess you'd better go."

The young man, having failed in every previous undertaking, was now more than ever cast down.

He had congratulated himself upon having at last found something for which he was fitted, but he soon heard mutterings which warned him that somehow he was not giving satisfaction. He did not seem to think that there could be the least objection to his turning to a book when there were no customers demanding his services. After receiving his discharge he went to his lodgings, where he found a letter from his grandparents urging him to come and live with them. Within an hour from the time of receiving the letter young Gansett was on a St. Louis and Iron Mountain railway train, rushing toward his new home. A day's ride in a stage-coach completed the journey. He was delighted with the old place. The Gansett farm was one of the best in the country, and the Gansetts were held in high esteem. The old house, part stone and part wood, was situated on a hill near the river, and was surrounded by great trees. To the young man who had been so much knocked about, the old place breathed a promise of rest. At first he hardly knew how to take his frolicsome grandfather, but he was shrewd enough to see that the old man was a man of excellent sense, and that, notwithstanding his prankish disposition, he was gentle and kindhearted. Len had just returned from a visit to Dogwood, a small village about two miles distant from the Gansett farm, when the old man asked him the question which opens the first chapter of this story.

"Lenqubees," said the old man, "you are pretty well

put together, an' I don't have no doubt but what you can make a mule powerful tired in the course of a day."

"I prefer riding a horse," the young man replied.

"Oh, I don't mean for you to ride the mule, but walk behind him. Hand me that pipe up there on the mantelpiece. Look out, don't knock off the camfire bottle."

Len handed him the pipe, and when the old man had filled it with tobacco he began carefully to pick up the crumbs which had fallen on his knee.

"You pick up those crumbs as if you had not a barn full of tobacco. You are surely a rigid economist, and you make me think with regret of how I used to squander my salary."

"I never squandered a cent of money in my life," the old man rejoined. "I have given money to the needy, but I never wasted it. Economy ain't a habit with me; it's a nature."

"Never squandered money, you say? How about horse-racing in your younger days? Don't mean that you always won, do you?"

"Oh, no, I often lost, but I took care to see that the men who won were needy. I never squandered a cent, Lenqubees."

Mrs. Gansett had left the room to drive a hen out of the kitchen. "Air you still a-twittin' o' that child?" she asked, upon reentering the room. "I declare, pap, that you act like you never heard o' it before. Don't you know that his mother wrote to us—Hildenroy never would write—and told us what they had named the child, an' don't you know you said you'd bet he lived? An' I know you hurt my feelin's, for when I asked you

how you knowed, you 'lowed that a child that could stand such a name two weeks would live to split his cradle into kindlin' wood. Len, don't let your grandpa torment you, for he's gettin' childish, I do believe."

The old lady, thoroughly satisfied with the remarks she had made, settled herself back in her chair, and the old man blew smoke through a grin.

"Oh, we are on the best of terms," Len replied. "He is more than welcome to all the amusement which my name can furnish. By the way," he added, rising and taking down a gun from a rack over the door, "believe I'll go down to the river and see if any ducks have come in."

"It's rather too soon in the season for 'em," the old man said.

"Well, I'll go anyway. Perhaps some of the skirmishers have come."

"That youngster is full of the 'Old Harry,'" said old Bob Gansett when Len had quitted the house. "He's mighty quiet now, but he's only feelin' his way. I don't think, though, that he's lazy, an' as long as he ain't that I ken put up with him. I do believe that laziness is the unpardonable sin."

"Pap, you ought to be ashamed to talk that way."

"I do, Sarah, sho's you're born'd I do. Just take a man that won't work an' he's ginerally putty well filled up with nearly all the other sins. A man that won't work ain't no 'count."

Len turned towards the river and thus mused as he slowly walked along: "What an odd old gentleman! Time has not relieved him of his love of fun. It is said

that humor ripens slowly, and I believe that it does. His fun is a kind of autumnleaf rustle,—not the dry leaf, for that would be satire instead of humor; but the red and yellow leaf, from which the sap has not all been drawn. There is a freshness here with which I find myself falling in love. This country is rude, but it is not raw, for there is a mellowness everywhere. Those great rocks in their skirts of gray and caps of green moss are grand. Here is where my father played when he was a boy. I have heard him talk of the wonderful fish he used to catch out of this river.”

He stood on the bank of the river and thoughtfully looked at the beautiful stream. The first frost had fallen, but it had been so light that the cotton stalk seemed to stand in surprise, not knowing whether to curl up its top leaves in obedience to the warning chill or to hold up its head and open its top boll; but the sycamore-tree, more easily discouraged, threw down its leaves and waved its bare arms in the evening’s long-drawn sigh.

“Not a duck in sight,” mused the young man. “Probably I may find a squirrel. Grandpa laughs at me so much that I don’t want to go back empty-handed. He must take me for a child, when in fact he would feel much older if he had passed through a few years of my experience.”

He turned into a narrow ravine. The summer’s sun had drawn nearly all the water from the little stream which was wont to flow through the ravine, and as the autumnal rains had been light there only remained a succession of small pools, so closely covered with leaves

that they could scarcely be distinguished from smooth patches of earth. Len had proceeded but a short distance when he stepped into one of the pools. Just then he heard a merry, ringing laugh. Looking up, he saw a girl sitting on a rock.

"You laughed just in time, young lady," said he, as he turned and began to climb toward the rock on which the girl was sitting.

"Why?" she asked when he had approached her.

"Because you might have heard something stronger than polite."

"Oh, ho!" she said, "that wouldenter made no diffunce, fur dad he cusses nearly all the time. He cusses the rheumatiz, an' when the rheumatiz ain't a-naggin' an' a-peckin' at him, he cusses the cow. He's the out-cussenest an' the outdationest man about some things you ever seen."

"May I sit down?" Len asked.

"Yes, if you're tired, squat. I ain't a-carin'."

The girl's face was pretty and her form was indescribably graceful, like a perfect letter found on a page of bad manuscript and which seems to have been made by accident. Her eyes were as brown as the leaves in the pool, and her hair was as brown as her eyes.

"What made your hands so black, little miss?"

"I'm not a little miss."

"What are you?"

"Dad says I'm a gigglin' gal."

"You haven't answered my question. What is the matter with your hands?"

"Wa'nut stain. Been a-hullin' uv wannuts fur winter."

"What is your name?"

"Ned Hobdy."

"That's a strange name for a girl."

"What's yer name?"

"Len Gansett."

"Yes, an' Lenqubees is a mighty strange name fur anybody, I'm a-thinkin'."

"How do you know my name is—"

"Oh, yer gran'mammy tole me all about how she was a-goin' ter write ter yer. Say, do I talk like a nigger?"

"Why do you ask such a question?"

"Cause when I went to school over at Ebenezer the fool woman—the pert thing—what teached the school said that I talked like a nigger. I kain't help it ef I do, an', mor'n that' thar's a plenty uv the folks in this here neighborhood that talks as bad as I does—yes, a all-fired sight of 'em."

"Where do you live?"

"Never mine axin" till yer've answered. Do I talk like er nigger?"

"No, you remind me more of a wild bird."

"Oh, git out!" she exclaimed, though not in ill-humor, for before Gansett could apologize for a remark which he feared had offended her, she said, "I live about a mile from here—in a little ole house that yer wouldn't hardly stop to look at. My mother is dead, an' I reckon that's the reason I talk like a nigger. I kain't recollect her, but they tell me that she died er praisin' the Lawd, but it won't be thater way with pap. He'll die a cussin' uv

the cow. Wall, I must be a-gittin' home, fur it's gittin' dark."

"Don't you want me to go with you?"

"Not much I don't. Talk 'bout a twelve-year-ole gal flyin' roun' with comp'ny. W'y, man, yer mus' be crazy."

"Well, good-by, Miss Ned."

"Good-by, Mr. Bumblebees."

Darkness came on before Len reached the house.

"I'll play a joke on the old gentleman," he said when he had reached the yard fence. He lay down by the fence, and began to squall like a chicken in distress. Instantly a door flew open, and the old man Gansett, bareheaded and excited, bounded out into the yard.

"Shew! shew!" he cried. "Sarah, cadfound the luck! the boy's got the gun, an' the deternal owls air a-totin' off all the chickens. Shew, there!"

Len roared with laughter. "Well, I'll be pestered if it ain't the fetchtaked boy," said the old man. "Sarah, I told you he was full o' the 'Ole Harry.' Come on in an' git your supper. Never mind, ole feller. I'll bet you a thousan' dollars that I git even with you, see ef I don't."

II.

DOGWOOD was a village consisting of a dozen dwellings, three rude storehouses, and the office of the "Weekly Picket." Len Gansett, soon after his arrival, had made the acquaintance of the Hon. Mangus Dockery, editor and proprietor of the "Picket." The journalist had shown Len many marks of favor, and had invited him to write for his paper.

"You might write me something funny," the editor said. "Everybody likes fun, and I am something of a humorist. As you lived in New Orleans you might have noticed that one of the papers there copied a thing from me. No, it wasn't humorous. It was—let me see—something about the cotton crop, I believe. Yes, gave me credit for it—right up to the handle."

Mr. Dockery wore jean trousers and a sort of linsey waistcoat, but his coat was "store made." He wore high-heeled boots. His face, in obedience to the demand of a strong nature, revealed the importance and responsibility of his position, yet Mr. Dockery was not imperious. He had often gone to one of the merchants and said, "I just lack seventy-five cents of having money enough to get out my paper this week. It will contain a handsome notice of your improved facilities for doing business, and, if you want—never mind. I was about to to say that if you would let me have the seventy-five cents—but really I am already under numerous obligations to you."

Mr. Dockery was once a candidate for state land commissioner, and although his name was not mentioned in the convention, yet he could justifiably assume the title of "honorable." He was a very handy man in the community, was courteous to strangers, and always felt that he was performing no more than his duty when he showed them into a back-room where the "Blind Tiger's" teeth could be seen. Dockery was much attached to the Gansetts, not especially because the old man was a subscriber to the "Picket," but doubtless because butter and chickens, brought from the Gansett farm, were often left at the printing-office.

Early one morning the Hon. Mr. Dockery called at the Gansett house, and requested Len to go home with him.

"My object is a selfish one, I must acknowledge," he said. "The fact is, I am rather pushed this week. A delinquent tax-list came in on me yesterday evening, and if I pay the proper attention to it I fear that I shall not have time enough to do my news columns justice; so, my dear young friend, I want you to do some writing for me."

"I have never written anything for publication," Len replied, "and I fear that I could not get up anything in the proper shape."

"Why, my dear sir," Mr. Dockery laughed, "who but a professional editor *can* get up anything in the proper shape? I will give you the points that I want written up, and I can revise what you have written."

"Go on, Lenqubees," said old man Gansett. "You

can't write up nothin' much wus than it has been wrote up in the past."

The editor winced, but agreed with the old man. "Why, come on," he urged. "I am sure that when you see your matter in print you'll not be ashamed of it. I know exactly how you feel, for I was once an amateur myself."

Len, without further protest, accompanied the editor. The home of the "Weekly Picket" was constructed of rough oak boards, set up endwise. The house had been built while the lumber was green, and the consequent shrinkage had left cracks so large that the editor was never placed under the necessity of raising a window for want of air. A placard tacked on the door bore the following announcement: "Having purchased a complete outfit of latest styles of types, we are prepared to do all kinds of job printing."

A strong man, at one load, could have carried away all the types owned by the Hon. Mr. Dockery, yet the editor was prepared to do all kinds of work. The hand-press was old and battered, and the "cases," judging from their ancient appearance, might have been used in Jacobite garrets in the reign of William III.

"Go in," said the editor, opening the door and majestically waving his hand. "Now," he continued when they had entered, "we'll sit down and smoke a while and then go to work. Come in!"

Some one had knocked at the door. Four men entered. They were introduced as Mort Haney, Asa More, Andy Tillotson, and Rufus Malone. They were uneducated farmers, and had come, they said, to "jaw"

the editor awhile. Len had heard his grandfather speak of the men, particularly of Mort Haney. Haney was a gaunt, gray-eyed man with stiff hair. Shortly after receiving an introduction to Len, Haney said:—

“Wall, how do yer like it out here?”

“Very well,” Len replied.

“Find a good deal of ignunce, I reckon?”

“I haven’t been around very much—”

“Oh, yer mean that yer ain’t found it yit, but ’low ter find it when yer do go round?”

“You misunderstand me, Mr. Haney. I do not mean to cast any reflections on the people of this commnuity. My father was born and reared in this part of the country, and I would be the last man in the world—”

“Come, gentlemen,” interposed the editor, “don’t let us have a misunderstanding. Mr. Gansett, these men can’t write like a professional, but they are honest.”

Asa More: “Yer bet we air, Dockery. We ain’t speech-makers, but we air as good jedges uv human timber as the next crowd that comes along.”

Andy Tillotson: “I believe I’m as good as any man, an’ dam’f I ain’t willin’ ter undertake ter prove it.”

Rufus Malone: “I never was much uv a fighter, but I ain’t been whupped yit.”

Len: “Gentlemen, you misunderstand me, are led astray by the misconception of Mr. Haney. He thought and without cause, that I had cast imputations upon this neighborhood, when, in fact, nothing was farther from my intention. It is sometimes a very difficult matter to explain the simplest mistake; so now, gentlemen, if I have said anything to wound any one’s feelings or

to arouse any one's resentment, I am sorry for it, and I humbly beg pardon."

Dockery: "Hang it, men, don't jower. Len, I wouldn't be surprised but our friends have been drinking a little, and we must therefore excuse them."

Mort Haney: "Nobody axed yer ter excuse us, Dock, an' I don't reckon that nobody wants yer ter. I wuz er talkin' ter this high-ferlutin' chap here. They say he's lazy an' won't work, an' that's putty nigh enough fur me at the fust offstart."

Len (angrily): "I have not asked you for your opinion of me, sir. I have begged your pardon simply because you hadn't sense enough to understand me—"

Asa More: "Dam'f I don't believe this thing's a-gettin' a leetle too warm for me."

Haney: "Hold on, Asa, an' don't go, fur I want you to see me through with this thing. I never urged this here fuss, an' I ain't responsible fur it."

Dockery: "Gentlemen, I am very sorry that this misunderstanding should have occurred. I know that old man Gansett will be sorry when he hears of this, all the outgrowth of the slightest misunderstanding."

Haney: "Damn old man Gansett!"

Len sprang to his feet, but was instantly seized by More and Tillotson.

"Come, now," said More, as he forced Len back into the arm-chair from which he had arisen, "none uv this, er yer'll git yerse'f inter buz'ness."

Haney: "Boys, yer all know me well nuff ter know that I ain't goin' ter stan' no break like that. No man ken 'wolf' me like that."

Dockery: "I regret it very much, Len, but this means immediate business."

Len (somewhat cooled down): "How does it mean business? It simply means that Haney is a fool for misunderstanding a simple remark."

Tillotson: "No, young feller, it means a good bit mor'n that. Haney won't put up with no man's slack, lemme tell yer, an' if thar ain't a change mighty quick thar'll be some powder er burnin' roun' here."

Haney: "Now yer talkin'. I ain't never tuck the 'vantage uv no man yit, an' I'll gin him a show."

Dockery: "Len, you'll have to fight; I see no other way."

Len (excitedly): "I am willing to fight, Mr. Dockery, but I don't want to commit murder or to be murdered."

More: "The means air honorable. Dock has a couple uv hoss pistols here."

Dockery (who has often marked paragraphs in the papers which he sent to exchanges): "Perhaps the gentlemen prefer Colt's?"

Haney: "Wall, it don't make no difference with me, only so fur as I have a chance ter vindercate myse'f; but thar's goin' ter be a fight, an' all hell can't prevent it. Asa More, I challenge that thing settin' thar, an' I want yer ter be my secon'."

More: "I'm with yer, fur I know yer've been insulted."

Dockery (approaching Len and placing his hand on the young man's shoulder): "My dear friend, I don't see how you can get out of it. Say (in an undertone),

that fellow ain't much of a shot. He'll fight, but don't let him frighten you."

Len: "I'm not frightened, but—"

Haney (overhearing the remark): "Yes, yer air skeered. Yer air a damn coward, an' yer know it."

Len (springing to his feet and striking a table with his clenched hand): "Haney, you've forced this on me, and now, damn you, take the consequences. Lead on, Dockery. I don't care whether we use pistols or cannons."

III.

THERE was no excitement in the village, for no one except the men who witnessed the quarrel between Len and Haney supposed that a duel was about to take place. Haney was insolently cool. Len was somewhat excited.

"This is a very unfortunate affair, Gansett," said Dockery, taking Len's arm, "and I hope you won't think that it is the way in which we in general conduct such matters. Some of the finest compositions I ever saw were communications growing out of little social differences, and which led to vindications of honor. I am sorry, for your grandfather's sake, that these arrangements could not have been touched up with a little more elegant formality."

Len shuddered, and the editor continued: "Haven't got a chill, I hope. If you have, I would like to recommend Peggleston's Pills; they are advertised in the 'Picket.'"

"Dockery, this is all foolishness," Len replied. "I was brought up in a civilized way, and I don't believe in such butchery. Say, Mr. Haney," stopping and addressing the "fire-eater," who strolled along a short distance behind, "can't we arrange this disgusting affair?"

"Ef yer ain't a coward, go on. It'll mighty soon be arranged."

"Come, Gansett," said the editor, "there is no alternative."

Len, without attempting further to settle the affair,

suffered himself to be led away. The place selected was a dreary sandbar, partly overgrown with stubby bushes. Len stood for a moment and gazed at the river. He had but a few moments' time, for Dockery, thrusting a pistol into the young man's hand, said:—

"He's standing off there waiting for you. Don't tremble that way. Aim at his breast. That's right; brace yourself."

Haney showed no signs of fear. Len had hoped that the impetuous man would, when he saw the near approach of blood, consent to some sort of compromise; but Haney's calm determination tore loose hope's last ligament, and, addressing the editor, he said, "Dockery, you know that I didn't bring this on. I tried to get out of it. Please tell my grandfather—"

"How much longer air yer goin' ter palaver?" shouted Haney.

"Stand steady, Len," said Dockery as he turned away. "Now you're all right."

Haney, whose lankness gave him the appearance of superior height, stood erect and defiant. A breeze stirred his long hair. The signal was given. The two reports were almost simultaneous. Len did not move. Haney staggered and fell. Dockery ran to Len and, in a voice not free from agitation, said:—

"Come, let us get away from here. Don't go and look at him; the remembrance will only make you feel worse when reaction sets in. You have killed him. Come on, I tell you!" excitably grasping Len's arm. "Damn it, man, we'll be arrested for murder."

Len no longer hesitated. When Dockery pronounced

the word "murder" the young man caught his breath with a quick gasp; and, turning, he followed the editor, who, with strides more far-reaching than graceful, was hurrying away.

"I don't know what to do," said Len, catching up with Dockery. "I am half inclined to give myself up."

"Then you are just half a fool, that's all. Confound it, don't you know that they'll hang you? Let's keep close to the river till we get to your grandfather's place. We'll stop at the house as if nothing had happened and get a couple of horses. We won't tell the old folks anything about it, but will manage to send the horses back after we are safe. Geewhilkans, man, you are as pale as a ghost. Let me take the pistol. I reckon the boys'll take care of the other one."

"Dockery," said Len, when they had gone some distance, "do you think I am a murderer?"

"Of course I don't think so," the editor replied; "but," he added, in a tone of voice by no means reassuring, "the law'll care devilish little for what I think. They'll hold me as accessory before the fact."

Len groaned. He did more than that: he whimpered. It was, indeed, unfortunate that he should, so soon after arriving in the State, violate one of its criminal laws. Every word Dockery uttered drove a nail in the coffin of hope. The editor frankly acknowledged that he could possibly have prevented the duel, but swore that he could not bear to see a friend—the grandson of a man whom he revered—grossly insulted.

Old man Gansett was standing at the gate when they arrived.

"W'y, you've got through with your work mighty soon," said he. "I 'lowed it would take you putty nigh all day. Glad it didn't, though. Wife she's out visitin'. Come in and rest your bones. Len, you ain't lookin' peart. Anything ailin' you?"

Len, averting his face, replied that he wasn't feeling very well. The old man was sorry to hear it. He had hoped that his grandson would enjoy the best of health.

"None o' the niggers air about," Mr. Gansett remarked as he opened the door, "an' we'll have a time all to ourselves. Take seats."

Len grew more and more nevous. "Murder, murder, murder!" rang in his ears.

"Well, if that boy ain't a sweatin' jes like it was July," said the old man. "Ah, Lord, boy, if you sweat this sort o' weather I don't know what'll become o' you when we turn the moul' board to the co'n. Dockery, have you seen Mort Haney to-day?"

Len started. The old man continued: "His wife was over here a while ago, ridin' the nag that Mort got from Josh Meyers. She'd been visitin' summers. The beatenest woman to gad about I ever seen. She said that Mort was to come after her, an' she didn't know what had become o' him."

Dockery replied evasively, and made a feeble effort to change the subject, but the old man, paying no attention to his guest's evident desire to introduce a new topic, continued: "It's mighty sildom that anybody hears me talk about my neighbors; but I want to say this about Mort; there's some mighty good p'int's about him, an' then ag'in there's some not so good.

When he gits a little lick in him he's as uppish as a hen a-settin'. I have thought it many a time, an' now I'm goin' to say it. If he don't mind, some feller that ain't got no mo' sense'n he has 'll shoot his head offen his shoulders. Don't you boys feel like eatin' a snack? There's plenty o' col' viddults in the kitchen. I'll go an' put it on the table."

"Oh, never mind," the editor expostulated. "We ate something just before leaving the berg. We really haven't time to eat, Mr. Gansett. The fact is, Len and I have a little riding to do and we'd like to borrow a couple of horses."

"Well, you air welcome to 'em, but you'll have to wait a while. I sent a wagon-load o' corn an' wheat to the mill this mornin', an' as I told the boy not to wait if the mill was crowded, he'll be along back now putty soon. Better let me fix you somethin' to eat. Len, ain't you hongry?"

"No, sir, I couldn't eat a bit. I—I—"

"Just my fix, Len," said the editor, coming forward with a well-timed remark, to cover the break in Len's protest.

"Well, if you can't eat, you can't, that's all. Jest excuse me for a minit, then, fur I do want to eat a snack."

"Len," said Dockery, when the old man had left the room, "we'd better pull out from here without waiting for the horses. The first thing we know a constable will be down on us. You'd better go and crowd your duds into a gripsack."

"Are you going back after your clothes?" Len asked.

The editor, sadly smiling, replied, "I brought mine with me. I always go accompanied by my wardrobe. I reckon, however, we'd better wait till the horses come. My goodness, boy, don't look that way! Change your face by the time the old man comes back, or he'll know that something has happened."

Len had arisen, and was standing with his back turned to the fire. His face was pale, and into his eyes, whose wont was liveliness of expression, there had crept a vacant stare. When the old man returned to the room Len sat down, but took care not to expose his face to Bob Gansett's investigation.

"It's mighty nigh time them horses was comin'," the old man observed as he peered through a window. "That nigger's had plenty o' time to—who's that comin' in at the big gate?"

Len started from his chair. "Set down," said Mr. Gansett; "it ain't the horses."

Len obeyed, and the editor, on whose face anxiety lurked like November shadows, and who had also arisen, sat down with a sigh of awful resignation. The old man opened the door, shaded his eyes with his hands, and said:—

"Yander comes the gang. I'd know it a mile off. There's Asa More, Andy Tillotson, and Rufe Malone. Wonder why Mort Haney ain't with 'em? I reckon he's gone down after his wife, not knowin' that she's gone home. Halloa, gentle *men*, come in!"

Len sprang to his feet, but Dockery, with more presence of mind and with more of a determination to meet any crisis, forced him back into his chair. "Be quiet,"

he whispered. "They have merely come to tell the old man what has happened, and they won't say anything as long as we are here. They are pretty good fellows, and will give us a chance to get away."

When the men entered the room with a decorum which made Len shudder, and which called forth an expression of surprise from old man Gansett, the editor attempted to smile, but the result was so barren that Len's heart sank, if possible, deeper than ever. The visitors sat down, and each one, unable to conceal the depression which he felt, gazed into the fire.

Bob Gansett: "Boys, you don't seem in yo' usual sperets to-day."

Asa More (shifting uneasily in his chair): "I ain't hearn no complaint."

Andy Tillotson (clasping his hands back of his head and stretching out his legs): "I don't know how it is with the rest, but I ain't feelin' so powerful brash."

Bob Gansett: "I don't know how you feel, but you look like you'd jes' come from a fun'al. Didn't see nothin' o' Mrs. Haney a-ridin' o' the bay nag, I reckon?"

Malone: "I ain't seed her in some time, an' mor'n that, I don't want ter see her soon."

More: "Rufe, ain't yer got no sense? Kain't yer keep yer mouth shet?"

Malone (frowning): "I've got a right ter talk, I reckon."

Tillotson: "Yas, when yer talk right."

Bob Gansett: "Come, now gentlemen, what is the matter? You talk like everything had gone to rack an' ruin. Where'd you leave Haney?" I'll bet you was

all carousin' together when he should uv' been goin' after his wife. Set down, Len, an' you, too, Dockery. Dog it, the old Nick 'pears to have tuck possession o' you all. I was jus' sayin' a while ago that Haney would ketch it one o' these days. I reckon you all recall the day at Brannon's log-rollin'; you recollect, don't you, Asa?"

More: "The time when he punched Alf Settle with a han'pike an' then 'lowed he'd shoot him? Oh, yas, I recollect it; an' if Settle hadn't er lacked sand Haney would 'a' got it that day."

Bob Gansett: "He couldn't chunk everybody round that way. He'll meet his match yit. Boys (addressing Len and Dockery), I'll swear I don't know what makes that nigger keep the horses away so long."

Malone, More, and Tillotson exchanged significant looks. The old man continued: "Len an' the editor 'low that they want to take a short ride."

More (in an undertone, but not so low that it escaped Len's ears): "A long ride, I reckon."

"What did you say?" Bob Gansett asked, putting one hand behind his ear and holding his head to one side.

More: "I said that it was pleasant weather for a long ride. I'd ruther ride now than any other time uv the year. How is it with yerse'f, young man?"

Len (nervously): "I don't know."

More: "Never rid much, I reckon."

Malone: "It's putty nigh time he was l'arnin'."

Bob Gansett: "Oh, he can ride, I reckon. He—Tillotson, you are the nearest, wush you'd see who's that at the door."

Tillotson opened the door. Mort Haney stepped into the room:

"Great God!" Len exclaimed, springing to his feet.

Then there arose a mighty roar of laughter. Old man Gansett took hold of the mantelpiece and laughed until the tears gushed from his eyes. For a time Len was speechless; but when he saw Dockery jerking like a sainted negro in a trance, it dawned upon him that he was the victim of a joke.

"All right, gentlemen," said Len; "you may laugh as much as you are a mind to, but rest assured that I am the happiest one of the party. Mr. Haney," he added, shaking hands with the man who would "ketch it one o' these days," "I am delighted to see you enjoying such excellent health."

"No gladder'n I am," Haney rejoined. "A fighter—w'y, young feller, I never fit nothin' in my life—never hurt nobody, er haw, haw, haw!"

Every one laughed. Old Bob wiped his eyes and said, "Ah, Lenqubees, I thought I heard a chicken squawl. My son, don't try to tamper with your grand-daddy. W'y, I've forgot mo' tricks then you ever knowed. I had to work this one mighty sly, for I was afeerd Sarah would find it out. Now, boys," the old man added, "I've got a leetle o' the best ole co'n in the country, made way up in Tennysy, where the hillsides air so steep that they lean back. I'll fetch it out, fur on sich an occasion we ken afford to dampen our whissuls."

The old man, still laughing, left the room, and the men threw out their quids of tobacco. The old man returned with a jug and several glasses. "There ain't

no harm in a little o' this," said he. "I've been hittin' it moderate along all my life, an' nobody ken say that I was ever drunk. He'p yourselves. Dockery, tetch it light, fur you know yo' failin'."

"He never fails to tech it," Haney remarked as he poured out a drink. Dockery took the jug, poured out a glass nearly full, and, when he had swallowed the liquor, said:—

"Ah, this beats a blind tiger."

Len declined to drink, and the old man, though pleased, remarked: "You'd better take a little for sociability's sake. You needn't be afeerd o' it, fur no Gansett was ever a drunkard."

"Especially those who never drank, anything."

"You are right, my boy; you are right," said old Bob, as he colored the bottom of his glass with a small drink.

"Believe I'll join you, my old friend," the editor announced, as he advanced again and took up the jug.

Haney: "When Dockery drinks it's like pourin' whiskey in a rat-hole."

More: "Not exzackly, fur a rat-hole never gits shaky."

Dockery: "Gentlemen, you may talk as much as you please, but you bet I know what's good."

Tillotson (who had taken a "stiff snort"): "Pears putty much thater way."

Dockery: "You needn't talk. Nobody can lay over you."

Tillotson (with a quotation from the southwestern classics): "No, not if the cou't knows herse'f, an' she thinks she do."

The conversation borrowed vivacity from the jug. Len felt no resentment, but with a thankful heart mused over his recent trouble. To him it was not only a joke, but a lesson; and, as the best lessons are the severest, he cast thankful glances upon his grandfather, perceiving which, the old man perceptibly warmed toward his grandson. By this time the editor and proprietor of the "Picket" was "putty full," and Mr. Tillotson, to say nothing of Haney, More, and Malone, was in that state which enables a man to see two objects when he should see but one.

Tillotson: "Dockery, how's the circulation of your paper?"

Dockery: "Circulation—why, blamed if I don't lead the band. I begun a serial story—wrote it myself—some time ago, and the circulation has doubled since then."

More: "How many—'scuse me (he had spit on Tillotson's foot),—how many papers do yer throw out at a clatter?"

Dockery: "Oh, I don't know how many. Fifteen quires."

More: "That ain't mor'n two thousan', is it?"

Dockery: "It ain't? You'd better go to school an' learn what a printer's quire is. Everybody in the county except you fellows take my paper. Two thousand, the—huck—devil!"

"Gentlemen," said old man Gansett, "I don't want to hurry you off; but Sarah'll be home putty soon, an' I wouldn't have her see you all in this fix fur nothin' in the world."

Tillotson: "Right, old man, right. Wouldn't want

her to see us. Ain't drunk, yer know, but don't want her ter see us. Come, fellers, let's move."

Haney, in taking leave, put his arm around Len and said: "Don't think I'd kill yer, do yer? Wuz ter see a man tryin' t' kill yer, shoot's head off. Oh, I am thar when it comes ter a row. Come on, fellers! Ole man, much ableeged fur kin'ness, an' will try an' merit return uv the same. Good-by, all han's."

"There ain't no harm in 'em," said the old man, when his noisy friends were gone, "but they lack backbone. Len, you didn't get mad, did you?"

"No, sir. I am so full of thankfulness that it was all a joke that there is not, in my soul, any room for resentment."

IV.

THE old man and Len were still talking of the joke when Mrs. Gansett returned.

"Air you still a pesterin' that child?" she asked, as she took off her sun-bonnet, rolled it up and placed it on a small shelf over the door. "I declare, pap, it is a sin an' a shame for as old a man as you air to carry on this way," she added as she sat down. "It does 'pear like you'd ruther pester a body then to eat the sweetest pie that was ever baked. It's joke, joke, all the time. You never ken set down an' talk like other folks."

"That's a fact, Sarah," the old man good-humoredly replied. "I never talk like other folks because you won't give me a chance; you do mighty nigh all the talkin' yourself. I ain't pesterin' the youngster; that is, not now. I had to pay him for makin' that chicken squawl, an' I've done it. Lenqubees, we'd better tell her, fur if we don't, an' she finds it out in any other way, we'll have to climb a mighty tall tree and strain our eyes 'fore we ken see the tail eend o' it."

Then the old man, occasionally assisted by Len, gave an account of the duel and the social affair which had followed.

Mrs. Gansett did not listen patiently, but, aside from exclamations of disapproval, she offered no serious interruption until the old man spoke of bringing out the jug.

"My sakes alive, pap!" she exclaimed; "did you let them good-for-nothin' men git drunk in my house?"

"Well, they wa'nt exactly sober when they left here."

"What made you let 'em drink here, say?"

"Well, I wanted to show Lenqubees that they ain't men o' backbone. The mo' a man knows about his associates the better it will be for him in the long run. When a man's sober he makes it his business to hide his natur'; when he's drunk he makes it his business to show his natur'."

"That's all foolishness," Mrs. Gansett replied. "It's all foolishness, an' you know it. It's jest an excuse for gettin' folks drunk, an' you ought to be ashamed o' yourself."

"When did I ever git anybody drunk befo'?"

"That don't make no diffunce. The principle o' one time is jest as bad as if you wus to do it a thousan' times. Len, your gran'pap acks like he never did have to die."

"That ain't it, Sarah," old Bob replied. "I ack like I know it 'an that I kain't he'p it. When the Lord calls on me I'll go, an' not till then, an' I don't want to ack like I want the Lord to hurry it up. Lenqubees an' me understand each other now, Sarah, an' don't you fret about me pesterin' him. How air they all over at Bralley's?"

"They air as pore as usual," Mrs. Gansett replied. "I declare I don't understand that fam'ly. Buck Bralley 'peers to work hard anuff,—an' goodness knows he's as strong as a 'steer,—but somehow they never have nothin' in the house. The chillun air mighty nigh naked, an' winter a-comin' on, too. I hearn while over there that old Ben Hobdy is down ag'in with his rheumatiz. He's a-cussin' an' a-swearin', an' he ain't got a

stick o' wood cut, nor a mou'ful o' meat, nor a dust o' meal in the house."

"Nuff to make him cuss," said old Bob.

"No, it ain't nuther. It's anuff to make him pray. He's liable to drap off at any minnit."

"By the way," said Len. "I met his daughter several days ago. She is a beautiful child."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gansett, "an' she's as kindhearted as she is putty. She does all the housework jes' like a grown woman, an' waits on her daddy jes' like he was a chile. The old man never wuz much account, that is, he hain't been sence his wife died. It makes my heart bleed to think o' Ned. Porè chile! I took her some linsy clothes t'other day, an' do you know that she was so mortal proud that she at fust refused to have 'em? She was, but I begged her an' worked with her tell she put 'em on. Well, I mus' go out an' see if Jane's got a fire started. A nigger'll funter round all day an' then not git nothin' done. I'd ruther do all the work than have my life pestered out of me about it. I'm goin' to put this ole piece o' carpet at the door, an' I want you all to wipe your feet when you come in. Pap would keep a body busy sweepin' out the mud he lugs in. I had this floor scoured yistidy, an' now look at it! Looks like a passul o' hogs had been penned up in here. I'm goin' to tell that editor to stay 'way from my house if he kain't keep from gittin' drunk. His old paper ain't much account nohow. Len, fetch in that big stick o' wood out there. I don't want yo' gran'pa to lift it. Pap, now don't you be in a swivit, fur we'll have some-thin' to eat putty soon."

V.

BETWEEN Dogwood and Oak Hill—a station on the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, & Southern railway—a stage-coach line was in operation,—the line over which Len had come. The owner of the line, Colonel John Bently, lived about two miles distant from the Gansett farm. Colonel Bently, a few years before Len Gansett took up his residence in the Abbott's Ford neighborhood, had come from the East. He bought a farm, and shortly afterward established the stage line. His house, upon which some little architectural effort had been expended, was, with its grounds of well-cultivated shrubs and carefully kept trees, an inviting place. The outhouses were neatly painted white. Guinea chickens cried "Pot-rack, pot-rack" in the yard, and the turkey-hen, with her long, graceful neck and bearing of meekness, reached up and picked the blueberries from the stubby cedar bushes. In the house there were many books,—books of adventure and books of philosophy. The colonel was looked up to by every one in the neighborhood. He was foremost in every movement for the welfare of the community; he was charitable to an admirable degree, and his flowing courtesy of manner and frankness of countenance made even the most humble and ignorant man in the neighborhood feel at ease in his presence. He had never been married, and, with the exception of the servants that found a home in his house, lived alone. He was apparently about fifty years old, and wore a

beard in which one could catch silvery glimpses of coming age.

Len and the colonel soon became acquainted. The young man felt proud of the attention which the colonel began at once to show him. Never before had he met an educated and wealthy man with whom he felt so free, and to whom it was so easy to talk.

One afternoon Colonel Bently called at Bob Gansett's house, especially, he said, to take Len home with him.

"You must stay all night with me," said he. "The old people can get along very well without you one night."

"I am willing enough to go," Len replied.

"Yes," said Mrs. Gansett, "for the pore child don't hardly go offen the place."

"Grandma, don't pity me, if you please. You talk to me as though I were a cripple or subject to epileptic fits."

The old man laughed. His wife turned upon him and said:—

"Now, 'pap, what are you a-winkin' an' a-blinkin' about? Kain't a body speak?"

"It pears mighty like a body ken," the old man replied. "By the way, Lenqubees," he added, "before you come home tomorrer I want you to go round an' tell the neighbors to come over Thursday mornin' an' he'p me roll logs. The dead trees in the lower fiel' air fallin' with every win'. I'm goin' to set the niggers to choppin' 'em in lengths right off."

"You have never seen a genuine log-rolling, I dare say," said the colonel, addressing Len.

"No, sir."

"Then you should attend."

"If you should happen to come along at the right time," said Bob Gansett, turning to Colonel Bently, "you'll find him there huddled up at the end o' a han'spike, buckin' ag'in Mort Haney or some o' the other fellers. Oh, I'm goin' tol'arn him somethin'—goin' to finish his edycation."

Len replied that he was willing to learn, and the colonel remarked that if he could recall a few years he could hold his own with the best of them. "Len," the colonel added, "if you are ready, we'll proceed. Mrs. Gansett, although I am not invited to the log-rolling, yet I shall take the liberty of being present at dinner."

"Do, Colonel Bently; do, if you please," Mrs Gansett replied. "We kain't promise you nothin' as good as you'd git at home, but we'll give you the best we've got."

"Now, Len," said the colonel, when he had shown his visitor into his library, "you must feel perfectly at home. In my house there are no arbitrary rules to be observed. If you are hungry between meals go to the dining-room and get something to eat. When I was a boy I was made so uncomfortable by formalities while visiting that I even then resolved that if I ever owned a house I would see that no uncongenial air came in at its windows; that no cramps and twinges of restraint should lurk about its hearthstone. You may sit in that rocking-chair, just as you are; you may lie down on a sofa, just as I am going to do, or you may walk about the premises. You may make free use of whatever you see, may go to bed when you feel disposed, and get up when you choose."

"Colonel," Len replied, casting a look of admiration

upon the hospitable man, "there seems to be no limit to the liberties which you grant."

"You should not regard such slight courtesies as liberties, but must bear in mind that the pleasure of your society outweighs, in my estimation, anything that I may do to make you feel comfortable. There are some pretty fair cigars on the mantelpiece. Help yourself, and hand me one. Thank you," he added, when Len had handed him a cigar. "I have a match, thank you."

As he reclined on a sofa, with one arm under his head and his eyes half closed, Len closely studied his face. "He is the most perfect type of the American gentleman," young Gansett mused. The colonel looked up, and Len, somewhat confused at being detected in his close scrutiny of Bently's face, said:—

"You have interrupted me in an agreeable contemplation, colonel: I was studying your features."

"Then excuse my untimely interference," the colonel replied, with a smile. "You must also understand that even my features are at your service."

"I was thinking," said Len, "how a man of your experience and reading can find my society at all interesting."

"An absurd thought," the colonel laughingly replied. "Why, don't you know that the old horse frequently takes great delight in playing with the colt? In associating with the young the old often catch the spirit of youth. The young man helps the old man to think of pleasant things. An old tree is grander when a sapling grows beside it. Do you like books, Len?"

"I am passionately fond of books, but I fear that my

taste is not very good. I prefer novels to the exclusion of more healthful, and by far more instructive, works."

"You must educate yourself out of that; but after all, the right sort of a novel is not unhealthful. I hold that the novel-reader is never wholly a bad man, for to be a lover of novels he must enter into the soul of the work. He must sympathize with the afflicted and rejoice with the happy character. Some of the world's greatest writers have been lovers of novels. Macaulay not only read every good novel which the English language afforded, but read novels in other languages; and to this thirst for bright literature must be attributed his powers of brilliant description. So, my friend, don't regret that you have a passion for novels, but regret, rather, that you have not also cultivated a taste for more solid reading. Come in."

A negro boy entered the room. "Well, Tom, what is it?"

"Mr. Honeycut is out on de po'ch, sah."

"Tell him to come in."

Mr. Honeycut came in and was introduced to Len. Mr. Honeycut's hair was cut square off, with a precision that would lead one to believe that Mr. Honeycut regarded such a truncated fashion as a style which he was compelled to observe. His eyes were small, with just enough room between them for the upper part of a very narrow nose. He had a tusk that lifted his upper lip into a perpetual snarl, and his neck, covered with red blotches, looked as though it might have once been hung up with bacon in a smoke-house. He had not taken the precaution to wipe his feet, and when he

stamped upon the hearth, which he did upon entering he scattered fragments of mud. He lived on Bently's farm, and made a pretence of cultivating a tract of land.

"Wall, colonel," said Mr. Honeycut, "how's the worl' usin' yer?"

"Oh, I can't complain," the colonel replied.

"I didn't know that yer had hearn uv it?"

"Of what?"

"The stage robbery."

The colonel sprang up from the sofa and exclaimed: "Confound it, man, speak out!"

"Wall, I don't know much ter speak, but I'll tell yer all I know. I was over at Dogwood about dinner-time, an' hearn that the stage had been robbed. The driver said that a putty good size sum o' money that wuz sent sent down from St. Louis fur Masklin & Bros., the cotton buyers, had been tuck. The gear wuz cut so bad that it wuz with differkilty that the stage could be drug in. Martin, the driver, said that he would be over putty soon an' tell yer all about it. One feller hit Martin over the head an' bruised him a right smart."

Len could not help but pity Bently. His face, a few moments ago so serene, was now streaked with lines of anxiety. The stage-driver soon made his appearance.

"I kain't hardly tell how it come about," said he. "I was kept at Oak Hill, waitin' for a train, and it was mighty nigh midnight 'fore I left. Thar was only three passengers, an' they give up all they had without makin' a show uv fight. We was all tuck by s'prize an'—wall, I was hit over the head."

"Martin," said the colonel, "this is the third time

within the past year that you have allowed your stage to be robbed. It does seem to me that you should make an effort—”

“How could I, colonel, when I wus hit over the head?”

“Let me see where you were struck,” said Bently. The stage-driver removed a bandage from his head and the colonel examined the wound. “It wasn’t much of a blow, Martin,” the colonel remarked; “it wouldn’t have cracked a peanut.”

“Oh, yes, it would, sir. It would have cracked—cracked—two uv them.”

“Martin,” said the colonel, “I don’t think that I can trust you any longer. You are too easily robbed, and, to tell you the truth, I don’t know but you are perfectly willing—”

“Great heavens, colonel, don’t say that! I’ve got a wife an’ chillun ter suppo’t, an’ ef what you’ve gist said wus ter git out I would be ruined. I dunno but I’m ruined anyway,” he added with a whine. “I’ve driv’ a stage so long that I don’t know how to do nothin’ else. Wife’ll be mightily bothered ’cause you’ve turned me off. Don’t know—”

“Well, well,” the colonel interposed, “go ahead. No, never mind wringing my hand. Mark you, now, that I want you to take better care of my interests.”

The driver, after many expressions of gratitude took his leave.

“I’d like to see a set uv fellers rob a stage that I had anything to do with,” Mr. Honeycut remarked. “I ain’t

much on the fight, but nobody never took nothin' away from me yit."

"It is easier to talk than to act," the colonel replied.

"Yas, that's so; but I wouldn't mine takin' holt uv sich a job. Kain't give me a set, ken yer?"

"Not at present, Mr. Honeycut."

"I didn't know. Wall, I'll leave yer."

When Mr. Honeycut was gone, the colonel, with an air of perplexity, walked up and down the room. A negro boy appeared and announced that supper was ready, but Bently heeded him not. Darkness came on, but the colonel still continued his meditative walk. At length he said:—

"Gansett, you must excuse my abstraction. You doubtless appreciate my position. Come, let us go to supper."

VI.

THERE was scarcely a word uttered during the meal. Occasionally the colonel, giving himself up to thoughts which "ciphered sums" of perplexity on his brow, would lean back and fixedly gaze into the featureless face of vacancy. When Bently and Len had returned to the library the colonel said:—

"Gansett, were you ever in trouble?"

"Oh, I have been in situations which I don't suppose any one would envy; but I kon't know that, aside from the sorrow incident upon the death of some one who was dear to me, that I have seen real trouble. I can say this: none of my stages have ever been robbed."

The colonel smiled. The "sums" of perplexity were wiped from his brow. "I don't know," he replied, "but that you are fortunate in not owning a stage line. The school-teacher, the congressman whose home is in a country town, and the owner of a stage line are not to be envied."

"The owner of the stage line has one advantage," said Len. "He can sell out."

"Oh," the colonel replied, with a shrug, "he has no advantage over the congressman, for the congressman can sell out."

"Yes, but the school-teacher can't. This makes his position the most unenviable of the three."

"You are right, Gansett. There is nothing in store for the country school-teacher. Yet the President's

place is not more important. Heigho! I hardly know what to do. It is almost impossible to catch those robbers. I can't do it alone, and the officers are not very active. I'll have to offer a reward. This will stir up the guardian angels of justice. There is in Missouri a band of train robbers, and I am inclined to the belief that they have opened a branch office in this neighborhood."

"And," Len suggested, "they seem to be doing a pretty fair business."

"Yes, but on borrowed capital. Well, there is no use in worrying over it. Gansett, I have learned a great deal from your grandfather. He is a philosopher, if there ever was one. If that man were to lose one arm, he would congratulate himself that the other one had been spared. I have never met a man the contemplation of whose character afforded me more pleasure and profit. His strong nature is set off by the gem of generous forgiveness. There are others who would make life a frown; he would make it a smile."

"Why," said Len, "you are trying to make a poem of the dear old man."

"He is a poem, Gansett; hexameter, for you know he is six feet."

The evening wore pleasantly away. The clock struck eleven. A stick of wood in the fireplace broke in two, and a cat jumped up with a sneeze of alarm.

"Gansett, your room is just across the hall. It is ready for you at any time; you may sit up all night, or go to bed, just as you like."

"Well, since it is left to me, I'll go to bed. Good-night," he added, arising.

"Good-night."

Len arose early next morning, and had gone out into the yard, when the colonel joined him and said, "Gansett, the dogs treed something over on the hill just before daylight. Don't you hear them? Let us go over, and if it is a 'coon we'll chop the tree down, hold off the large dogs and have a fight. Here, Rogers," calling a negro, "get an axe and bring it along. Did you ever see a 'coon fight, Len?"

"No, sir."

"Then you have been cheated out of rare sport. Come, let us hurry."

They found the dogs "barking up" a large oak tree.

"Git 'im down, ole boys; git 'im down!" exclaimed the negro, as he stuck his axe into the tree. "It's eider er little 'possum ur er 'coon."

"Why a little 'possum?" Len asked.

"Caze er big 'possum ain' ap' ter climb er big tree. Git 'im down, ole boys! Mus' I chop her down, cun'l?"

"Yes, go ahead. Let's see. Throw it out there in that open place. Chop as fast as you can, and when you get tired I'll relieve you."

The colonel relieved the negro from time to time, and when the tree was about ready to fall Bently took the axe and said, "Rogers, call the dogs and hold them until the tree falls. Gansett, take hold of that large dog. Don't be afraid of him. He won't bite you. All ready? Here we go!"

The colonel dealt a few more blows with his axe. Scream, snap, boom! The small dogs rushed into the

waving "lap" of the fallen tree. The large dogs howled and attempted to break away.

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed the colonel, springing on to the stump; "turn loose the big dogs! It's a bear!" Len turned loose his dog and took to his heels, but soon regaining his presence of mind, and ashamed of his fright, returned.

"Rogers," cried the colonel, "run to the house and bring my gun. He'll kill all the dogs."

The bear had been wounded by the fall, and although unable to defend himself with those cool and summary movements of destruction so well known to canine prowlers of the cane-brake, yet in a very few minutes he had killed two of the dogs and had taught the others to keep a healthful, if not a respectful, distance. Rogers soon returned with the gun.

"Do you want to kill him, Gansett?" the colonel asked.

"No, I believe not."

"What, wouldn't you like to say that you had killed a bear?"

"Not a wounded one."

"Well, he has to die," said the colonel as he cocked the gun. "It is impracticable, if not impossible, to give him liberty, and upon this hypothesis he deserves death. Here he goes!"

The bear rolled over, and the dogs, knowing that all danger was past, rushed upon the fallen monster and then fought among themselves.

"Rogers," said the colonel, "I forgot to tell you to bring a butcher-knife."

"I fotch one, sah."

"All right. You'd better stick the old gentleman, and then get the mules and drag him to the house. It's the first bear I ever saw in this neighborhood, Gansett. I suppose he came out of the bottoms on a foraging expedition. Well, let us go to breakfast."

Immediately after breakfast Len set out, as his grandfather had requested, to summon the neighbors to the log-rolling. Every one was willing to come. Summoning a man to a log-rolling is appealing to his honor. The most shiftless man in the neighborhood, the man who cares not to work for himself, and the seat of whose jean trousers are threadbare, is generally the best man at a log-rolling. Luxemburg was feeble and sleepy in a calm, but in battle his eyes flashed and his bearing became august. In every-day affairs the leader of a log-rolling is lazy, and his words are uttered with a weak and peevish accent; but when he steps upon the ground where the handspikes are in readiness, his aspect undergoes an ennobling change: his voice is clear and ringing, and, with a mathematical eye, he sees the weak point of every log. Braley, whom Mrs. Garsett had said was as "pore" as usual, was this sort of a man. Had he not been included in the invitation, he would have been grievously offended. In cold weather he was nearly always out of wood, and during a sleet or snow storm the near neighbors could hear the reluctant strokes of his axe as he attacked saplings which grew within easy reach of his house. His boys wore clothes too large for them, and it seemed that his girls always wore winter frocks in the summer and summer frocks in the winter.

Braley's house, built of round logs, was easy enough to find,—not because it was built on an eminence, for it was not; but because, if any one should be near, the whooping and yelling of the children would attract attention and serve as a guide to the place. When Len Dismounted from his horse and entered the yard several boys and girls, catching sight of him, uttered exclamations not unlike the sounds made by hogs when taken by surprise, and scampered away. Some of them “broke” for the stable, and others, unable to clamber over the fence, crawled under the house. A gaunt man came out of the house, and Len, introducing himself, stated the object of his visit.

“Glad ter see yer, sir,” said Mr. Braley. “Come in ther house an’ rest yerself.”

Len accompanied him into a room rank with the smoke of strong tobacco, and was introduced to a scrawny woman with reddish hair. One corner of her mouth was drawn down, having yielded to the constant pressure of a “snuff stick.” She was a type of the nervous and worn-out class of women so often found among the poor people of the South. To such a woman married life is slavery. She may have once been bright and cheerful, but a few years of drudgery naturally saps the cheerfulness from her life, and leaves, instead, asperity of temper and whining complaint.

Mrs. Braley turned from the work of baking corn-bread on the hearth, and said, “Set down over thar. Take the other cheer, that’n’ll tilt back with yer. Buck,” addressing her husband, “why’n’t yer drive that

fetchtaked dog out? Don't yer see he's got his nose inta ever'thin'?"

Braley shoved the dog with his foot and meekly sat down.

"Yer hain't been livin' yere long," said Mrs. Braley, turning to Len.

"No, only a few weeks."

"Wall, I don't see what anbody wants ter come yere fur," she replied, as she put a shovel of fire on the lid of an oven. "It's a mighty pore place ter see any sort uv enjoyment."

Mr. Braley sat twirling his thumbs. His wife continued: "It looks ter me like the men in this country don't do nothin' but set round from mornin' till night."

Len, attempting to lead the conversation to subjects more pleasant, invited Mrs. Braley to take dinner at his grandfather's house on the day of the log-rolling. His attempt was not successful.

"Law me!" she replied, "I never go offen the place, an' so fur as goin' is consarned, I'd jest as well be in jail, every bit'n grain. Is yer folks all well? That's a blessin'," she added, when Len had replied affirmatively. "Ole man Gansett is a show fur ter see. A cricket ain't no pearter'n he is, an' nobody ain't got no better heart. Yer gran'maw, like the balance uv the women, is w'arin' out mighty fast. Keep yer seat."

"No, I must go, as I have one or two other places to visit."

"But set right down. Dinner'll be ready in a minit."

Braley cast a beseeching look on Len, and Len, thinking that he understood his host, sat down. The woman

drew out a table from against the wall and placed cornbread and fried bacon upon it.

"Draw up yer cheers," she said. The men obeyed. About this time the children began to make their appearance. They scrambled with one another on the hearth, each one struggling for the privilege of "sopping" the skillet.

Braleley accompanied Len to the fence. "Tell the old man that I'll be thar bright an' arly," said he.

"All right."

"Say," he called, as Len was riding away, "come over some time an' we'll go huntin'. I'm the cap'n in that line."

The day for the log-rolling came with a glow of glorious sunlight. The air was keen, and the dogs sniffed the frost on the dead grass and scampered in glee. The men came early. Mort Haney, Andy Tillotson, Asa More, Rufe Malone, and several others were on hand by the time the sun showed himself, but they were all preceded by Buck Braleley. Len, after seeing Braleley, had doubted the propriety of inviting him; but now his doubt was turned into surprise. Braleley walked with the air of a conqueror, and his voice, so weak a short time before, was vigorous now. Old man Gansett brought out his jug.

"Good to take the cobwebs outen a man's throat," said Mort Haney as he poured out a liberal drink.

"Hurry up with yer licker, men, an' le's go," shouted Braleley. "We're burnin' daylight here. Come ahead, all han's! Ole man, better have a bucket uv water sent out, fur we don't want no foolishin' atter we git thar."

Some of the logs were very large, and the strong men tottered under their weight.

"Put down yer han'spikes, men," Braley would yell. "Turn her over. Here we go!"

"Ken we walk with this'n?" Asa More asked as he looked at a large log.

"Yes," Braley rejoined, "we ken walk with anything. Slew her aroun', boys. Put chips under yer spikes so yer ken ketch holt. Ready, all han's? Here we go!"

Len was lifting against Braley. The young man's knees smote each other, and he was just on the eve of giving up, when Braley, resting his handspike on his knee, reached over the log, tapped Len on the shoulder and said:—

"Keep yer cend up, young feller. Oh, yer ken sleep without rockin' ter night." Len made another effort and was successful. "Now, men," shouted Braley, "yer'd better rest, while I go over yander and' skirmish round a little."

The suggestion met with silent approbation. Endurance with the log-rollers was a matter of pride.

"Who's that a-comin'?" some one asked, as a horseman came within sight. "Dinged if it ain't Parson Murray, the circuit rider. Reckon he must've smelt the pot a-b'ilin'."

Mr. Murry may not have "smelt the pot a-b'ilin'," but the chances are that he had. He rode up to the fence, stopped, spoke to the men, and leisurely threw one leg over the horn of his saddle.

"Won't you light, Brother Murray?" old Bob Gansett asked.

"No, I believe not."

"Better git down an' look at yo' saddle," said Mort Haney. "We're goin' ter open a kag uv nails an' wring a dish-rag atter a while."

The preacher, smiling blandly, said that he would greatly enjoy such an occassion. Just then the welcome sound of the dinner-horn was heard. Braley, who had returned from his skirmish, said, "Parson, we'd like fur yer to ax a blessin' fur us at ther dinner-table. Uv co'se yer nee'n't er eat nothin'."

"I'll see about the eating part," Mr. Murray laughingly replied.

"Come on, all han's," shouted Braley. "Let's eat an' git back yere, fur we ain't mor'n half through yit."

The preacher dismounted, and, with his bridle rein thrown over his arm, walked with the men. When Len reached the house he found that Colonel Bently had arrived, and, among several women who had come, he found Ned Hobdy, the little girl who had so deeply impressed him. While the men were on the gallery, washing their faces and hands, the girl approached Len, who stood apart from the rest and said:—

"Howdy?"

"Why, how are you, little miss?"

"Whut yer reckon I come fur?" she asked, with a laugh.

"Oh, I don't know."

"I didn't come ter eat dinner like yer think I did; but I come just because pap said I could. Air yer glad ter see me?"

"Yes, very glad."

"I don't believe yer. Ef I wuz er grown lady yer mout be, but yer ain't as it is. Do yer see this new coat?" she said, shaking the skirt of a bright-colored dress.

"Yes."

"I made it myse'f. Ain't I smart?"

"Come on in ter dinner," shouted Braley. "Young feller," addressing Len, "I'm goin' ter pull yer this evenin'. Yer'd better git strength outen the pot."

VII.

THE table, spliced with boards and "set off" with many old dishes with blue rims, extended the full length of the dining room. Some of the men put on their coats, but the majority of them sat down in "shirt-sleeved" disregard of appearances. Mrs. Gransett was much worried by the cares imposed upon her, but then she was never happier than when she contemplated her guests in the act of "gorgin' their appetites." Colonel Bently had sent a bear roast, which proved an attractive feature of the dinner.

Colonel Bently (addressing Braley): "How are you getting along with the work?"

Braley: "Fust-rate, con'l; fust-rate. Some uv the logs air old residents; but we kotch 'em nappin' an' have put 'em whar they'll do the most good."

Mort Haney: "Oh, Braley knows how ter take advantage. It comes nachul ter him."

Braley (with due appreciation of the compliment): "Bet yer life I do! Whut do yer think uv it, young feller?" (addressing Len).

Len: "You seem to understand your business."

Braley: "Now yer're shoutin'. When yer wake up in the mornin' an' find yer j'int's like rusty hinges, yer'll be willin' ter bet that I'm ther cap'n."

Bently (addressing old Bob): "I am inclined to believe that our friends will find Len to be much tougher than they imagined."

Old Bob: "Let 'em go ahead. I never seen a Gansett that was easily floored, an' I don't b'l'ever they ken do much to him."

Mrs. Gansett: "Air you men tryin' to plague that child?"

Len (with an air of embarrassment): "Grandma, I must protest against being called a child."

Asa More: "Ef he's a child, I'd like to know how big ther men git whar he come frum. I'll take another help ter that sweet-pertater pie, ef yer please. Not as much as yer give me befo'. 'Bout half as much."

Rufe Malone: "Jest as well give him as much, fer ef yer don't he'll ax fur mo'."

Braley: "By ther way, colonel, hain't hearn nothin' frum the stage-robbers yit, I reckon?"

Bently: "No; as they have not furnished information with regard to their whereabouts, the officers of the law have not found them. The reward I offered, of course, had a stimulating effect, but has resulted in nothing but assurances that the rascals shall be brought in. Honeycut, who seems to possess some of the unenviable qualifications of the bloodhound, is still on the track. He is certain that the leader of the gang is Steve Grade, the Missouri outlaw. I don't know what reasons he has for believing this, but reconcile it with the reflection that if we believe nothing except that which is based upon reason so plain that every man can see it, we would indeed be an incredulous people. With regard to one thing I have made up my mind,—that if the law will not give me better protection I shall discontinue the stage line."

Bob Gansett: "I hope you won't do that, colonel, for it would be a serious loss to the community."

Bently: "Then let those who profess to uphold the law take that into consideration. No one should expect me to go on in this way."

Len: "I share your opinion, colonel. If the law is powerless to protect you, I would, if so situated, protect myself, by withdrawing from an enterprise so full of loss and vexation."

Braley (shoving back his chair): "*Gentlemen*, yer talk may be mighty interestin', but it don't roll logs. I don't want ter hurry yer, but it's time we wuz a-gittin' back down thar."

Asa More: "Oh, don't be snatched!"

Braley: "Talk's cheap, but it don't lift nuthin'. Come ahead, *gentlemen*!"

The logs were piled and fired before the sun went down behind a curtain of November gauze. The men, when their work was done, sat around a blazing log-heap and told jokes that had come from North Carolina many years before. On one occasion Mr. Mangus Dockery, editor and prosumable owner of the "Picket," had published several of these jokes, having been assured that the incidents related had taken place in the Abbott's Ford neighborhood; and, several weeks afterward, while searching his exchanges to see if any of them had been copied, he became indignant upon finding the following paragraph in a Tennessee paper: "An insignificant sheet in Arkansas, limitedly known as the 'Picket,' is not content with clipping articles without giving credit, but publishes as original old jokes that were brought in

wagons to Tennessee seventy-five years ago. A driver of a certain wagon, when asked where he got his load of jokes, said that they were willed to him by his grandfather, who had inherited them from his mother's great-uncle."

"What air you men jowerin' about?" old Bob Gansett asked, turning to Asa More and Rufe Malone.

More: "Nothin' in perticuler."

Malone: "Yas, it is sumthin' in perticuler. Asa called me a lie an' I don't 'low ter put up with it, nuther."

More: "Wall, he did tell a lie, an' thar ain't no use 'n tryin' to crawl out en it. Said that his daddy come ter this State befo' mine did."

Colonel Bently: "Well, what difference does that make? In view of my own recent trouble I am almost tempted to say that coming here did not reflect credit on either of them."

More: "That's all right, but I wanter be put squar' on the record. Rufe's been tryin' ter pick a quarrel with me fur some time, an' now dam'f he kain't git it."

Malone: "Ain't been tryin' ter pick a quarrel with yer, no sich uv a thing, an' yer know yer air lyin' when yer say so."

Bob Gansett (with an air which Len had never before seen him assume, but which was well known to certain people in the community): "Hold on, boys, I don't want no fightin' here, an' by the bones o' old Andy Jackson, I won't have it! More, set down there!"

More (resuming his seat): "Jest as yer say, old man.

Say, 'spose yer sen' fur yer jug an' let's have soom licker."

Bob Gansett: "Not a drap o' licker do you get here. When a row begins it's no time to handle the jug."

More: "That's all right. We was jes foolin' wa'n't we, Rufe?"

Malone: "Yas, that's about all."

Gansett: "You fellers would make any sort o' acknowledgment now that whiskey is under discussion, but it's better not to have any now. You air welcome to it, boys, that is, so far as givin' it is concerned, but as things have took an ugly shape you kain't git a drap."

Old Bob's last remark closed the discussion, and one by one the men sought their homes. Braley went to the house with old man Gansett. When they had entered the yard, Braley said:—

"Ole man, I don't like ter ax yer, but I'd like ter have a midlin' uv meat. We're out at my house, an' ef yer'll let me have it I'll pay yer fur it in a day ur two."

"Pay the devil," the old man replied. "I don't want no pay. You ken git all the meat you want. Come inter the smoke-house an' pick out what you want."

Braley selected a "side" of bacon, and, carrying it like a carpet-bag, took his way homeward. His battle had been won, but the victory illumined not his brow—lent not elastic pride to his step. As he climbed over a fence, or, rather, as he sat a moment on a fence, with his bacon resting beside him, he was an ideal picture of subjugation, of a meekness which could feel no resentment. When he reached home his children greeted him with shouts, and one of the boys, whose appetite for the

"greasy" must have been keen, ran to his mother and exclaimed:—

"Pop's got hog-meat."

Braley entered his house with the air of a man who owes an apology. His wife shook out her knob of red hair and snapped:—

"Putty time uv day ter be gittin' home."

"Here's some midlin' meat," Braley replied, holding up his treasure as a propitiation.

"I see it," his wife said, with a snarl. "Think that all yer've got ter do is to work like a dog all day an' then fetch home a little modikin uv meat. Dan's bar-footed, an' 'Liza ain't got no shoes, an' here yer stay away all day."

They wouldn'ter had no shoes ef I hader stayed at home, would they?"

"Oh, shet your mouth! I never seed the like on the face uv the Lawd'ul Mighty's yeth. It do 'pear like ther men is a-gettin' wus an' wus ercount ever' day. I wush I wuz a man."

"Wush yer wuz," Braley meekly replied.

"Oh, shet your mouth! Yer doan' know whut you wush. Fur the Lawd's sake!" she exclaimed, turning in bewilderment, and contemplating the fragment of a garment which one of the children held up in the doorway; "that fetchtaked, deternal ca'f has chawed the sleeves offen my caliker coat."

"Wall, wall," said Braley, "we'll git anuther one."

"Who'll git anuther one?" she snapped. "I'd a like ter see yer git one. I've been livin' with yer long time, an' I don't know when yer got me one."

"I ken tell yer. Las' Ginnywerry wuz a year ago."

"Wall, it wuz give ter you. Oh, don't talk ter me, fur yer ain't no 'count. Whut did yer have fer dinner ter-day?"

"We had a b'ar roast, an' chicken pie, an' fresh hog-meat, an' slice pertater pie, an' I don't know whut all."

"Yes, an' I lay yer stuffed yerse'f tell yer wus fit to pop. Ole Buckley wuz here ter-day an' he wants yer ter he'p him gether co'n ter-morrer. I reckon yer air glad uv it, fer it gives yer a chance ter git away frum home ag'in. I wush I wuz er a man."

"Wush yer wuz."

"Oh, shet yer mouth!"

There was one little soul that evening who went to a dreary home,—Ned Hobdy. She found her father sitting by a cheerless hearth. She brought in several sticks of wood when she entered, and placed them on the fire. The old man's face was darkened by pain. His hair was bushed up in antagonism to all gentleness, and his watery eyes snapped in anger:

"Whut ther he'll made yer stay all day?" he exclaimed.

"Couldn't get erway no sooner, dad."

"Ther hell yer say."

"Dad, please don't cuss an' fuss," she said, approaching the old man, gently stroking his grizzly hair, and pressing her beautiful face against his forehead.

"Wall, damn it, how did yer expect me ter git along?"

"W'y, dad, yer said yer rheumatiz wuz better, an' that I mout go."

"Yes, damn it; but it come back to me."

"Don't cuss, dad. Ther bad man'll git yer ef yer do. Look," she added, taking up a basket which she had brought, "here's a whole lot uv nice things Mrs. Gansett give us. I'll set ther table an' we'll have er nice time."

"Is ole Gansett's nephew still thar?"

"Yas, sir."

"Proud as the devil, ain't he?"

"No, sir. He's jest as nice as he ken be."

"Yas, like hell."

"Dad, ther bad man'll git yer sho ef yer don't stop cussin'. One time ther wuz a man an' he cussed an' cussed. Ever'budy tole him ter stop, but he wouldn't do it. He'd cuss when he went ter bed an' cuss when he got up, so, one day, the bad man came an' put a chain roun' his neck an' led him away off down in the holler an—"

The old man laughed, and the girl sprang to his side, seized him with a pretence of violence and kissed him.

"Wouldn't treat me mean, would yer, dad?"

"No, little precious, fur yer air the sweetes' thing in ther worl'. I love yer—"

"Thar now, dad," she said, as the old man began to shed tears. "Jes cuss as much as yer wanten an' ther bad man shan't have yer—no, he shan't. Don't cry, fur we're goin' ter have sich er nice supper, an' then I'll rub all the pains away, an' then we'll be all right. Jes' set right still now till I fix ther table. Here's some jelly fur yer an' some—some ever'thing. That's a good dad. Wait now till I fix yer cheer."

Rufe Malone was strolling along the road leading in

the direction of his home when he was overtaken by Asa More.

"Whut's yer hurry?" More asked.

"Ain't in much uv er hurry," Malone replied, turning and waiting for More.

"Joggin' towards home?" More asked.

"Yas, got my feedin' ter do."

"Wush the old man had give us some o' that licker," said More. "I need a drink right now."

"So do I."

"S'pose we go on out ter Dogwood an' git some," More suggested.

"Reckon we ken make ther raise?"

"I think so. Dockery knows whar it is."

"I wouldn't mind goin', Asa, but I've got ter go home an' feed."

"The stock ken wait tell yer git back. Let's cut across here. Whut do yer say?"

"All right, I'm with yer."

They found Mr. Dockery in his office. The editor was assuring a man that the debt should be paid immediately. "Wait till the mail comes in," said Mr. Dockery. "That is, you needn't wait, for I understand that the stage is late, but come round in the morning."

The man suddenly withdrew and the editor greeted his friends.

"Who is that feller?" More asked, meaning the man who had just left.

"Oh, he's a galoot," Dockery replied. "He's the fellow that started a saw-mill about ten miles from here,

some time ago. I owe him for some lumber, and he acts like a crazy man."

"He'll be atter yer ag'in in the mornin'," said Malone, "fur yer tole him yer'd pay him when the mail come in. 'Spect any money in the mail?"

"There might be some. It's missed so often that it ought to hit this time."

"Anybody owe yer?" More asked.

"Let me see. Yes, one man in Little Rock owes me. Yes, but I see that he's dead. Anyway, I might get some money. To tell you the truth, I'm looking for a registered letter. I don't know exactly who from, but I feel as though one is on the road. It would be just like some fellow to send me an advertisement with payment in advance."

"Say, Dock," said More, "we didn't come to hear about your prospecks, but ter see ef we couldn't mak the raise uv a little lickier."

"I don't know, boys, whether—"

"Oh, yas, yer do know."

"Let me see. I know where we can get some stuff, but I tell you now that it ain't good."

"It'll jolt a feller, won't it?" Malone asked.

"Oh, yes, it'll jolt."

"That's all we want."

"Well, let's go then," said Dockery. "We'll have to be sly about it."

Night had set in and clouds had blotted out the stars. Dockery shuddered as he closed the door of his office. He might have caught a glimpse of the spectacle which he was soon to witness.

VIII.

THE three men went into the back room of a disreputable-looking shanty, kept by an old man whose hair and beard were white with a pretence of honorable age, but in whose eyes there was a twinkling squint, that peculiar look and that sly snap which has never characterized the eyes of the truly honest man. The man who sneaks around and gets a drink of whiskey at a "blind tiger" may be an honest man, that is, he has many chances in favor of such a supposition; but it is a pretty well accepted fact that the man who keeps the "blind tiger" is perfectly willing to take money and run the risk of having it said that he acquired it in a way peculiar to the methods of honesty.

The room in which the visitors were shown was dimly lighted by a flickering candle, placed upon a bracket made of a shingle and supported by a wooden peg. The three men drew chairs up to a rough table and sat down.

"Who's doing this?" said the editor, placing his elbows on the table.

"Oh, I reckon we air," Asa More replied. "I've got a little dust summers down here in my sock. Here, old man," addressing the proprietor, "fetch us some lickin'."

The old man held up his hands, and with a quaint caper of caution hissed "S-h!"

"Wall, now, here," said Malone, "what's the use'n all this tomfoolery? Yer know whut we come in here fur."

"Yas, I know; oh, yes, gentlemen, I know," the old

man replied, rubbing his hands together as he approached the table. "What'll yer have?"

"Licker, uv co'se," said More.

"All right, gentlemen, but we hafter be mighty quiet about it. There's a lot uv fellers nosin' roun' fur ther gran' jury an'—"

"Oh, wall, give us the bug-juice an' don't talk," More broke in. "We know whut yer're hère fur."

The old man brought three glasses of whiskey and a tin cup of water.

"Great Geehossiphat!" exclaimed Malone, as he put down his glass; "this stuff's strong enough ter kill a mule."

"You'd better look out, then," Dockery replied.

"An' now, here," rejoined More, "we don't want no editin' bus'ness in ourn. Needn't think that 'cause yer've got mo' edycation than we have that yer're better'n we air."

"Don't think so, my dear fellow; don't think so," Dockery replied, as he put down the cup of water. "I'm your friend—by the way, Malone, your subscription's out. You told me some time ago that you couldn't get along without the 'Picket,' and you'd better renew. What do you say, old fellow?"

"I don't b'l'ieve I wanten sign fur it ter-day," Malone replied.

"Oh, now, here," said Dockery, "you know that you want it."

"Dang it, Dock, I ain't got ther money."

"I saw that you had three dollars just now."

"I know, but I am a-needin' uv that."

"Don't need it as much as I do."

"That mout be, but I ain't perpared ter think as you do."

"Here," said Dockery, calling the old man, "repeat this."

The old man refilled the glasses and Dockery said, "Remember this against me."

The old man muttered his disapproval of remembering it against Mr. Dockery, whereupon the editor said:—

"Oh, now, here, you know I'm all right. You were willing to trust me one time."

"Yæs," the old man replied, "an' ef I hadn'ter trusted yer then I mout be mo' willin' ter do it now."

"Well, that's all right. We'll fix it. My regards, gentlemen!"

"Dock," said Malone, "we had ther boss dinner ter-day over at old Gansett's. Helped him roll his logs. Fine time, I tell yer. Preacher Murray come bogin' along jest about dinner-time. He didn't talk much at the table, fer he kep' his mouth putty well stopped up with viddles. I'd hate ter have as straung apertite as that man's got an' not have nothin' ter dam her up with. He's er rip snorter, as the feller says. Old man, give us another dose uv yer pizen."

The old man, still cautious and nervous whenever he heard a sound, filled the glasses again.

"Drink hearty," said Malone, as he raised his glass. "I tell yer whut's er fack," he added, wiping his mouth on his coat-sleeve, "they may say what they please about licker, but it's a dev'lish good thing in its place. As the feller says, we need a little somethin' to brace us up."

"Yes," replied Dockery, "man needs a stimulant, not so strong as this stuff,"—tapping the rim of his glass,—
"but a little livelier than ordinary water."

"Gentlemen," said the old man, "I wush yer wouldn't talk quite so loud."

"Damn it, what's the matter with you?" More exclaimed. "Yer put me in mine uv er skeery hoss that's allus lookin' out fur somethin' ter git skeered at."

"Wall, yer know they mout snatch me up an—"

"Oh, let 'em snatch!"

"I don't say let um snatch," the old man replied. "They snatched me wunst, an' I liked ter never got outen it."

"That's all right," said Dockery, with an air of impatience. "We'll not discuss it. I know, we all know, that you run risk, but—say, my old friend, give us a little more of this stuff, and to-morrow I'll—"

"Not another drap, Mr. Dockery, without ther money."

"Oh, well, it's just as you say."

"Dock," said Malone, "Asa an' me come mighty nigh comin' tergether ter-day."

"That so?"

"It's er fack," More replied; "but we made it up."

Malone: "As the feller says, Asa an' me couldn't afford ter be at outs."

More: "No, bet your bottom dollar we can't. We've been knowin' each other er laung time, an' our folks befo' us knowed each other."

Dockery: "The strong ties which hold you together

could not be easily broken. What did you quarrel about to-day?"

"Nothing but a piece uv foolishness. We got ter talkin' about when our people come ter this State, and Asa called me er lie, an' then we jowered a little."

More: "Yas, I called him a lie, but we made it all right atterwards. Fetch us some more lickin', ole skin-flint!"

The glasses were filled again. The men were loud in declamation.

Malone: "Any man that says I've got anything ag'in' Asa is a damn lie."

Dockery: "I never heard any one make such an assertion."

Malone (striking the table): "An', by God, nobody'd better say it!"

More: "Nobody will say it, Rufe. Ever'budy knows that we love each other like brothers. W'y, dang it, I'd fight fur yer quicker'n lightnin'!"

Malone: "Gimme yer han', ole podner."

More (grasping Malone's hand): "Put her thar. Yas (turning to Dockery), we like ter fit ter-day; but yer see hew we feel about it now."

Malone: "Like ter fit er about er damn piece uv foolishness, too. Asa called me er lie an'—"

More: "Yas, but, dang it, we made it all right."

Malone: "I know that as well as anybody does."

More: "Wall, then, let it drap."

Malone: "Ain't it dun drapped?"

More: "Don't 'pear like it has."

Malone: "Ther hell it don't."

More: "Yas, ther hell it don't."

Dockery: "Gentlemen, your quarrel has been adjusted, therefore let us talk of something else."

More: "I ginerally talk about what I damn please, an' I don't need no advice, nuther."

Malone (addressing More): "An' ef yer think that I don't talk like I damn please yer're on the wraung road."

More: "It don't make er damn bit uv diffunce ter me how yer talk."

Malone: "Wall, keep on a-thinkin' thater way an' yer'll get slipped up on atter awhile."

More: "Oh, I know yer're ther sort uv man ter slip up on er feller."

Malone: "Never slipped up on nobody yit."

More: "No, an' yer'd better never try ter slip up on me."

Malone: "I don't have ter slip up on yer. I ain't afeerd uv yer, Asa More, an' the sooner yer reckernize that fack ther better it'll be fur yer."

Dockery: "Gentlemen, don't quarrel."

The old man: "I don't want no quarrelin' in my house."

More: "It don't make er damn bit uv diffunce whut yer want, yer've got ter take whut comes. Rufe Malone, I called yer a lie ter-day, an' I meant it too."

Malone sprang to his feet and exclaimed, "Take that back, uv you'll wush yer hed."

More arose and said, "I take nothin' back. I ken whup any uv the Malones ther best day they ever seed."

"Oh, sit down, boys," Dockery expostulated. "It won't do to get into a fight here."

"It'll do ter git inter er fight anywhar an' at any time when er man calls me er lie," Malone vociferated. "More, ain't yer goin' ter take that back?"

"No, I ain't."

"I'll give yer five minits."

"Make it five seconds."

Malone seized a hatchet that lay on a barrel and made a motion at More. More "ducked" his head, and then, with a terrible blow, Malone buried the blade of the hatchet in More's head. A groan, and the man fell dead.

"Great God!" exclaimed Dockery. "What have you done?"

"I've killed a damn scoundrel, that's what I've done. Let me outen here. Don't yer try ter stop me, ole man, fur I'll kill yer in er minit!"

Malone rushed from the room. Dockery and the old man gazed upon the horrible sight. A gust of wind extinguished the candle. The two men could hear the blood dripping from the table. The old man, after much fumbling, lighted the candle. The murdered man was gone. Dockery and the old man looked in amazement at each other.

"Great Lord!" said Dockery, "what has become of him?"

"It beats anythin' I ever seed," the old man replied. "Even ef he'd been erlive he couldn't er got out without me knowin' it, fur I was standin' right here in the do'. I don't un'erstan' it, I tell yer."

"Well, I'll swear!" said Dockery. "If a man had told me that such a thing could happen I would have thought

him a fool. We've got no time, though, to investigate mysteries. It is our duty to go and inform the authorities."

The town was soon aroused. The "blind tiger" was ablaze with lanterns and torches. The place was searched, but save the blood on the floor, not a trace of the murdered man could be found.

"You fellers air puttin' up a joke on us," said the sheriff.

"I'll swear by all things holy that I saw More's head split open with a hatchet, and I saw him lying dead on the floor."

"Then why ain't he here now?"

"That is something beyond my ability to explain."

"Well, there's something mighty crooked somewhere. We can't hold an inquest until we find the body. I reckon you fellers had better come along with me," addressing Dockery and the old man. "I'll have to keep you in hand tell this matter is sorter cleared up. Now, don't get excited, Mr. Dockery. Of course we don't charge you with committing murder, but almost anything can happen in a "blind tiger."

"I'll give bond for my appearance," said the editor.

"I reckon not," replied the sheriff. "Affairs of this sort ain'tailable, if I understand the law. I don't like to take such a course, but I reckon I'll have to take you to jail. Oh, yes, you'll go, Mr. Dockery. I'm your friend, understand; but you'll have to board with me till we understand the situation a little better. Come on!"

IX.

OLD Bob Gansett was foreman of the grand jury. There is some difference between the foreman of a grand jury and the foreman of a petit jury, for the foreman of a petit jury is expected to know nothing, whereas the foreman of a grand jury is expected to know everything. Old Bob, with his characteristic energy, exerted himself in behalf of Dockery and the old man who kept the "blind tiger;" and, with an eye to exact justice, it was his purpose to exculpate the old man from the suspicion of complicity in a murder, and then indict him on the charge of unlawfully selling liquor. When old Buck—the only name by which the "blind tiger" man was known—discovered this, he more than ever lamented the fact that a murder had been committed, not on account of the atrocity of the crime, but because his own ungodly vocation had been exposed.

The sheriff arrested Malone. When found, Malone was in the woods, chopping a saw-log; and when the sheriff made known the object of his visit Malone stuck his axe into a stump and said:—

"Uv co'se I'll go with yer, Jim. This is all new ter me. I left Dockery an' ole Buck with More, an' when I left 'em More 'peared to be enjoyin' putty fa'r health. Me an' More have allus been fust-rate frien's, an' I don't know why anybody should cuse me uv killin' him, still I'll go with yer."

"That's ther way to talk, Rufe. I don't believe you air guilty, but I hafter have you all the same."

"I know that, Jim," Malone replied as he put on his coat; "but it strikes me in er putty bad time, as I've got ter git out er lot uv logs. Wal, I'm with yer."

The mystery was still as deep as ever. That a murder had been committed no one entertained a doubt, for More was missing; but no inquest could be held upon the supposition, even though it was strengthened by the blood in the "doggerly."

"You kain't do otherwise than hold Dockery an' ole Buck," said Bob Gansett, addressing the sheriff; "but I am satisfied that they ain't guilty. Dockery wouldn't kill anything but whiskey."

"I am of your opinion, specially consarnin' the whiskey," the sheriff replied. "I have thought uv a plan that I think'll work."

"What's that?"

"Wall, I have found the body."

"What!"

"Yes, found it in ther woods erbout er ha'fer mile from here, buried in a hole whar a tree had blowed up."

"How do you suppose it got there?"

"I don't know, but somebody'll explain befor' long."

"What is your plan?"

"Wall, I'm goin' ter take Malone outen jail, assshore him that he is at liberty, an' that we all b'l'ëve him innocent, an' take a walk with him in ther woods, in the direction uv the body. If he's guilty he'll try ter change my co'se. Won't want ter go to ther place whar ther body wuz buried."

"Jim, I didn't know you understood human natur' so well."

The sheriff smiled. "I don't know nothin' erbout books," said he, "but I know a right smart erbout men, an' men wrote ther books."

The sheriff went to the jail, and, drawing Malone aside, said:—

"Rufe, we're all satisfied that you ain't guilty. Hold on, you needn'ter thank me, thank yourse'f. Come on out an' le's talk over this thing. I want you ter he'p me sift this matter."

"Yer ken bet all yer've got that I'll he'p yer all I ken," Malone replied.

"Oh, I know that, Rufe. You ain't never went back on me yit."

"No, an' I never will."

"I know that."

They turned away from the jail and were soon in the woods. The sheriff began to talk of his chances of reelection. Occasionally he would clutch Malone's arm, and sink his voice into a confidential tone. Nearer and nearer they approached the place where the murdered man had been buried. Malone attempted to change the direction of their walk, but the sheriff, enthusiastic in the enumeration of his qualifications for office, continued to approach the grave. Malone became nervous. Of course the sheriff did not notice it. Malone stopped.

"Let's go over here an' set on that blowed-up tree," said the sheriff.

"No," replied Malone, "I must go home."

"Whut's you hurry, Rufe? Come on, I want ter talk ter you about the Anderson boys."

Malone walked a few steps farther and stopped again.

"Come erhead, Rufe."

"No, I—I—"

"Look here, Malone," said the sheriff, as he drew a pistol, "you know damned well what's over thar, an' thar ain't no use in tryin' ter honeyfuggle me. The sooner you own up the better it'll be fur you."

Malone trembled violently. "Own up," said the sheriff.

"I kain't hide it, Jim; kain't do it ter save my life. I killed him."

Malone was taken back to the jail. Dockery and old Buck were liberated. Malone made a full confession.

"How did the body disapppear so mysteriously?" old Bob Gansett asked.

"That's easy ernuff ter explain," Malone replied. "When I rushed outen ther room I went roun' ther house ter lissen at what Dock an' Buck had ter say. Jest as I peeped through a crack ther wind blowed out ther candle. The mean whiskey had made a devil outen me an' I had nerve ernuff ter do anything. Ther house, yer know, is built erbout two feet offen ther groun', an' I knowed that ther broad planks uv ther floor wa'nt nailed down. I seed xackly whar ther body laid, an' when ther light went out I knowed that I could raise er plank an' drag ther body under ther house. I darted under, an' ther idee worked like er charm. By ther time the candle wuz lit ergin, I was draggin' ther body frum under the house. I am a good deal bigger then

More, so I wrapped my coat er round his read ter keep it frum bleedin' on ther groun', tuck him up an' toted him off,—that's ther whole sum an' substance uv it."

Shortly after Dockery was released he approached Len Gansett, who had just come to town, and, after cordially shaking his hand, said:—

"Len, I am devilish glad to see you,—devilish glad!"

"They had you in a pretty close place, Dockery."

"Didn't they, though? The fact is, I wouldn't care but for one thing: they've fooled around until I am behind with my paper. My subscribers should not expect me to get it out on time when I'm in jail."

"I should think not."

"But they do. Gansett, let me tell you something. There is nothing in this world so unreasonably exacting as a man's subscribers. They expect him to be a saint, and at the same time be familiar with all phases of sin; they do, damned if they don't. Now, sir, I'll lose at least three subscribers by this transaction—*three*, just think of it! Say, Len, I'd like for you to help me a little."

"I can't set tpye, Dockery, but I'll help you write."

"My dear boy, writing is but a small part of newspaper work. Any unprofessional can write. The blooming school-girl and the gosling boy can write."

"Then, what do you want me to do?"

"Well, as the worst has come to the worst, I'll teli you. Just now, when I went to the office, I found that the sheriff had put a log chain around my press. Not satisfied with restraining my personal liberties he must strike one more blow at American institutions and ham-

per the press. Why did he do it? I'll tell you. I owe—or at least he says I do—an uneducated man the paltry sum of twenty dollars for as poor a lot of lumber as you ever saw—twenty dollars. I assured him that he should have his money; but, unwilling to give me a chance, he took advantage of an oppressive law and locked up the fountain from which the intelligence of this community flows. Now, I say it boldly, too, that when an uneducated man—a log-ripper—can hamper the press, why, then it is time for intelligent men to take action. Let me have twenty dollars.”

“Dockery,” replied Len, as he began to search his pockets, “I have only eighteen dollars. You are welcome to what I’ve got.”

“The sum is quite sufficient, my dear boy, quite sufficient. I will pay the oppressor ten dollars, pay four dollars on my office rent, and with the remaining four dollars I will lay in a stock of paper. See that man?” (pointing); “well, he’s another enemy of printers’ ink. Ever since I started the ‘Picket’ he has been an advertiser. In the last issue of my paper I thoughtlessly placed another merchant’s ad. above his, and, sir, he ‘kicked’—oh, he ‘kicked’ like Adam’s off ox. I wouldn’t have minded his ‘kicking,’ but he ordered his advertisement out. How do people expect a man to run a paper when advertisers act that way?”

“You must have advertisements, I suppose?” said Len.

“Must have, sir,” repeated Dockery. “Why, sir, a paper without advertisements is a pretence! I wouldn’t let such a sheet come into my house. Advertisements

are the ballast, while the reading matter are the sails. Without advertisements a paper flops and flounders like a wounded fish—does, damned if it don't!"

"Say, Dockery, is it true that Andy Tillotson has been arrested on a charge of stealing a cow?"

"Well, the report is substantially true. Andy has been arrested. Why, sir, if any man had told me that Andy was a thief I would have disputed the assertion with all the vigor of a strong nature. Do you know what that fellow did? He headed my subscription list. He renewed his subscription the other day; but now that he's in hock I don't suppose that I'll ever get the money. That's the trouble in running a newspaper, Gansett. You never know when a subscriber is going to die or be taken to jail."

"Why, don't you engage in other business, Dockery, if so many ills attend a newspaper?"

"Len, it is simply this: I am not fitted for any other business. When a man masters the intricacies of one calling he cannot, in middle age, turn his attention to a calling with which he is unfamiliar."

"How long have you been in the newspaper business?" Len asked.

"Let me see. It will soon be three years since I became a professional."

"What had you followed previous to that time?"

"Law, Gansett, law; but I must say I did not like it. Oh, law is very good for some people, the groove man for instance; but it is obnoxious to the man who yearns to break away—to tear asunder dust-covered strings and to soar among the clouds of grand gloom and sublime

brightness. In law a man must linger in a starvation state until some older lawyer takes him up. Then he enters the office of the older lawyer, does much tedious writing, does legal drudgery, and receives just enough of the profits to enable him to have his breeches skilfully patched. That's law, Gansett. I don't know how it strikes other people, but it seems to me that a young lawyer's coat can get slicker than a similar garment belonging to any other man. The young doctor is pretty hard to beat, but I think he must yield first place to the young lawyer. Say, Gansett, come and take dinner with me. I board over at that weather-boarded house. Come on! Say, one word before you go. My landlady is a very peculiar woman. She mutters about men that owe her. Sometimes I think that she is losing her mind. Do you know a move she's going to make. She's going to refuse to allow me credit for my three days in jail. Yes, she will do it as sure as I'm a living man; but do you know how I'll get even with her? I'll make her wait for what I owe her."

Malone was speedily brought to trial. He attempted no defence, only claiming that he had not committed murder; that his action was impulsive instead of premeditative. The facts as brought out by the examination of men who had witnessed the quarrel at the log-rolling, and the facts as given by Dockery and old Buck, tended to brand Malone as a murderer; yet, with unjust lenity, he was only sentenced to a term of three years in the penitentiary. The next day Andy Tillotson, convicted of stealing a cow, was sentenced to a term of five years.

"Well, have you got through with that good-fer-nothin' gran' jury bus'ness?" said Mrs. Gansett one evening when old Bob and Len returned home.

"Yas, I reckon I am."

"I hope so," Mrs. Gansett replied. "It do seem that thar's allus som'thin' to take a body away from home. It's awful cold," she added as she shoved a dry board between the logs in the fireplace. "I know you air mos' froze. Len, child, put your feet out there an' warm 'em. Bob, there's a hole in your shoe. Wall, for pity sake! Jes look at it. Len, I had a visitor to-day,—little Ned Hobdy. It's foolish to say it, I know, but I would give anything if that child was my daughter. I never saw such a sweet child as she is. Jes' to think how she takes care o' her father. I knowed they hadn't nothin' much to eat in the house—"

"Where have they got it to eat if they haven't got it to eat in the house?" old Bob asked, slyly winking at his grandson.

"Goodness gracious!" vociferated the old lady. "Kain't a body say a word without bein' picked up? As I was goin' to say, I knowed they hadn't much to eat, so I offered the child a pone o' co'n light bread an' some meat, but do you think she wanted to take the vidults? I could hardly persuade her. Poor child, it's a pity an' a shame that she ain't better off. Whut did you fetch?" noticing a tin pail which old Bob had placed on the table.

"We stopped by Mort Haney's," the old man replied, "an' Miz Haney made me take a mess o' chitterlin's."

"Wall," said the old lady, "I'm much obleeged to her. Did you thank her?"

"I don't rekerlect."

"You don't? Wall, for pity sake, Bob, have you lost all your perlitness? Len, did he thank her?"

"Yes, grandma."

"Well, then. I declare to goodness your gran'pap is gettin' so keerless that he distresses me. Bob, befo' I forget it let me tell you that a fetch-taked dog scratched a hole under the smoke-house and toted off a midlin' o' meat."

"He must've been hungry," old man Gansett replied, with another sly wink at Len.

"Wall, fur pity sake, Bob, is that all the thanks a body gits fur tellin' you. Len, mighty little comfort a body gits outen your gran'pap. Supper is ready if you have warmed yourselves."

"Isn't it ready, anyway?"

"O Bob, for goodness' sake, hush! Come on. Len, light the other candle."

X.

A DEEP snow, the deepest that many of the oldest inhabitants had ever seen, lay on the ground. The air was keen and crisp, and the sun shone as brightly as though springtime had come.

"What," said Mrs. Gansett, entering the sittingroom, approaching the fire and holding her hands over the blaze, "you ain't goin' out sich a day as this, air you?"

Len had drawn on an overcoat, and was putting on a pair of mittens. "Yes," he replied, "I thought that I'd take a stroll."

"W'y, gracious me, you'll freeze! It's mighty nice overhead, but it's awful under foot."

"Grandpa has been out nearly all day."

"There's no accountin' fur your gran'pap, Len. It do seem to me," the old lady continued, as she turned the churn around, "that he's been out in every spell o' weather that has come along sense we was married. In the spring an' summer he ain't satisfied unless he's drip-pin' wet, an' in the fall an' winter he 'peers ter be on tho'ns till he goes out an' gits mos' froze. Air you goin' a-huntin'?"

"No, I am merely going out for a walk. To tell you the truth, I thought that I'd go over to old man Hobdy's. I have never seen Ned's father, and I am curious to meet him."

"Wall," said Mrs. Gansett, as Len turned toward the door, "you'll meet a Tartar, as sho's you're bornd."

Len, after receiving directions as minute as the old lady could give, set out through the trackless woods. He crossed the river on the ice, not foregoing a few boyish capers as he did so. He had climbed over a fence, and had started across a small field, when some one shouted to him. He looked back and saw a man approaching.

"You don't seem to know me with these trappings on."

"I do now," said Len, extending his hand. "Colonel Bently, how are you?"

"First-rate. This weather makes me young again. Which way?"

"Thought I'd go over to old man Hobdy's."

"Better come with me. There's a turkey and a lot of quail waiting for me, and I don't know that you could do better than to come and share them with me."

"No, thank you, colonel; I have made up my mind to go to Hobdy's."

"That's nothing. Come with me. I have just unpacked some old books that my grandfather, many years ago, bought of an old second-hand book-dealer. Several of them reach as far back as 1640. There is one particularly in which you would find interest. It is entitled 'A Quiet Rest for Good Men's Souls, and a Terrible Warning to Men whose Minds are Steeped in Sin and Iniquity.' There are also several political tracts, one of which, it is thought, was written by Milton. Now, what do you say?"

"The temptation is great, colonel; but like the boy who is resolved not to go to the brook, but, in spite of

all allurements, goes to Sunday school, I must keep in the road of previous intention. At an early day, however, you will find me handling your musty treasures. Where have you been out this way?" Len asked, hoping to change the subject, for, although he greatly desired to see the little girl and her father, he felt that the persuasive colonel, should he persist, might gain his point.

"I have been out to Dogwood. With more compassion for my horse than consideration for myself I decided to walk. Horses in this country get along badly in the snow. By the way, I will tell you why I went. Honeycut sent me word that he had captured one of the stage-robbers. This was, indeed, a welcome piece of news; but when I saw the suspected man I was convinced of his innocence, that is, so far as the robbery is concerned. I found a miserable, shrinking tramp, a fellow with hunger enough to steal, but with not enough courage to rob. He looked as though he were about to be hanged, and when I gave him five dollars, and told him that he was free, he looked at me in bewilderment, burst into tears, and hurried away. So Mr. Malone has gone to the penitentiary. The gallows would have been more befitting. I suppose you noticed how lightly he got off and how severely the law took hold of Tillotson. It is nearly always the way in this country. The jury looks with commiseration on the man who sheds blood, but frowns darkly upon the thief. The leading men of the country censure this; they condemn it in unmeasured terms; but let a Northern newspaper affirm it, and they denounce the paper as a slanderous sheet."

"Yes," Len replied, "because they know that the

Northern paper does not speak of it in the desire to bring about a reform, but uses it as a political lever. The law is not enforced in the North much better than it is in the South. Blood may be cheap in the South, but in the North human life is sold at wholesale. The rich proprietor of a great mill looks without feeling upon the women and children who are wearing out their lives in his service. He needs not say that he cannot better their condition. He can well afford to pay them more for less work. Does he help the poor consumptive who is dying at his loom? No, he assists in getting up a charity ball, which, after the expenses are paid, leaves but little for the suffering widows and the starving children. He assists in getting up the ball, not because he is desirous of relieving distress, but because he knows that the newspapers will praise his generosity. The fashionable woman dances while the starving woman waits for something to eat."

"Why, my dear boy," said the colonel, "you are getting very warm for a man who is trudging through the snow. You almost make me think that we are in a harvest field. Is not that a shock of wheat? Oh, no, it is only a stump covered with snow. You observe that my eyesight is not so good as it used to be. Ah, I have made you laugh! I do not like to see you so serious, for then you look like an old man. Len, it is useless to discuss the evils of our time. They are many, they are powerful, and cannot be corrected except by those who practise them."

"And to them," said Len, "we need not look for correction."

"You are right. Thank God that I have never oppressed any one. Say, do not the people of this community amuse you?"

"Yes, I find in them an interesting study."

"I know you do. When I go to church, or any public gathering, I am always entertained by what I hear. In the city we find slang; here we find an expressive dialect. I would like to know the origin of some of the words I hear. The other day I heard Mort Haney in speaking of striking a negro, say, 'I didn't faze him.' When you think of it, 'faze' is an expressive term. Then, again, there is the word 'momox,' meaning to execute badly. The first time I ever heard it, Honeycut used it in telling me that he had hired a negro to bottom a chair, but that he had 'momoxed' it. Your grandparents use many words that amuse me, but I notice that their dialect is a little different from that of many of the people. At first I did not understand the cause, but I soon learned that it is because they are from Tennessee. I am not sure, but I think that they introduced the word 'momox.' I tell you this is tiresome walking. Let us sit on the fence and rest a while."

They had crossed the field. Len turned over a rail to knock the snow off, and the colonel, thanking him for his consideration, climbed up and seated himself.

"Do you know, Len, that these people are now glad that the war terminated as it did?"

"I have not heard many of them express themselves, but I think that they are."

"They are, sir, without a doubt. They now know that had the Confederacy succeeded in establishing itself

they could have hoped for nothing better than social slavery. They know that the slave-owner would be supreme, and that a poor man would be looked upon with contempt. If Congress should now grant to the Southern States the right to go out of the Union, not one of them would go out. Have you ever thought of the lenity with which the leaders of the rebellion were treated?"

"The history of the world furnishes no parallel," Len replied.

"You are right, my dear boy. 'The man who leads a rebellion against an established government,' says Macaulay, 'stakes his life on the event;' but it was not the case in this country. Do you know why?"

"Yes," said Len; "it is because the American people are the most humane people in the world."

"You are right. Although I was born in England—came to this country when I was quite young—yet I agree with you. I believe that it was Carlyle who said that a nation or people who borrowed its language from another nation could never be truly great; but I differ from him."

"The Americans did not borrow their language," Len replied. "The men who left England and came to this country brought their mother-tongue with them. It was their language, and they had a right to leave it to their children; so I think the English language is as much the inherent right of this country as it is of England. Well, colonel," Len added, as he got off the fence, "I must proceed."

"Won't go home with me?"

"No, not to-day."

Len left the colonel sitting on the fence. When he had gone some distance he looked back, and saw his friend reading a newspaper with as much contentment, it seemed, as though he were sitting in his library. Len experienced some difficulty in finding Hobdy's house, but at length he unexpectedly came upon it. Ned was chopping wood in the yard. Len climbed over the fence and approached within a few feet of her before she saw him.

"Wall, ef this ain't er come off," she said, throwing down the axe.

"Why, my little girl, what are you trying to do?"

"Ain't tryin' ter do nothin'. Jes doin' it, that's all."

"Let me chop it for you," said Len, taking the axe.

"Wall, but hurry up, fur ther fire is almost out an' dad's got his pains bigger'n er mule. Yistid'y he walked all er roun', but he's snatched ter-day."

"Now, let me take it in for you," said Len, when he had chopped several sticks of wood.

"Wall, but let me go in fust, fur ef yer wuz ter s'prise dad he mout cuss yer. He's the cussenest man yer ever seed when he's got his pains."

Len followed the girl. "Dad," said Ned, as she stepped into the room where the old man sat, "here's Mr. Len."

"Damn Mr. Len!" roared the old man.

"Don't pay no 'tention ter him," said the girl, "for he's got his pains. Wait till I rake up ther chucks an' then put ther wood on ther fire. That's it," she added, when Len had followed her directions.

"Damn yer," cried the old man; "don't kick yer foot ag'in' my leg."

"I won't," said Len.

"Wall, ef I hadenter throw'd out er hint yer would."

"No, I wouldn't. I am very careful."

"Yas, damn keerful."

"Dad, don't cuss. Mr. Len, ther bad man is goin't ter git dad ef he don't look out. W'y, this mawnin,' while I wuz out in ther yard he come erlong an' put his elbows on ther fence, an' says, 'Whar's that man that cusses so?' 'He's dun gone,' I said, 'an' yer neenter come here airter 'im.' Then he wenter way an' hain't been back sence. Mr. Len, set on this cheer, fur that'n'll spill yer."

Old man Hobdy looked at Len and said:—

"Ned 'lowed yer wa'n't stuck up."

"Well. I'm not, I hope, Mr. Hobdy."

"Mr. ther Devil," said the old man, as he scowled and with a jerk drew up one of his legs. "I don't know whut yer've got to be stuckup erbout. Ef it wa'n't fur yer gran'daddy yer'b be as pore as er June rabbit."

"Dad," said Ned, as she approached the old man and put her hands on his head, "don't scold Mr. Len, fur look at ther nice wood he fotch in fur yer."

"Who 'n hell's scoldin' him?"

"Thar, dad, fur pity sake don't cuss."

"Who could he'p cussin' when thar ain't nothin' ter eat in ther house?"

"Yas, thar is, dad; thar's ther turkey. Oh, let me tell yer, Mr. Len! This mawnin' when I went out ter feed ther cow whut did I see but er gre't big turkey er settin' on the low limb uv er tree. I knowd that dad couldn't

shoot him 'cause he had his pains, so I slipped in ther house, got ther gun, slipped out, put it on ther fence, tuck aim jes' thiser way, shet my eyes an' pulled. Bang went ther gun, an' then ter flop, flop, flop, ther old turkey fell. I gethered him up an' fotch him ter ther house an' scalded him an' picked him, an' I'm goin' ter cook him, an' airtter all that dad says thar ain't nothin' ter eat in ther house."

"I didn't think erbout that," the old man replied.

"But he oughter think erbout sich things, oughtn't he, Mr. Len?"

"I should think so," Len ventured to reply.

The old man looked at him with a fierce glance and replied, "Yer don't know whut ther hell yer'd think."

"Thar, he's cussin' ergin," said ther girl. "Le's run erway an' leave him, Mr. Len. We kain't stay with people that cusses. One time there wuz er man that cussed an' cussed, an' ther bad man—"

"Damn ther bad man!"

"Dad, fur goodness sake, hush," she said, as she smoothed back his hair. "Don't pay no 'tention ter him, Mr. Len, fur I know his pains must be awful."

"Yer don't know er blame thing erbout it. Git erway an' let my ha'r erlone," the old man vociferated. "Yer air allus tellin' whut yer know, an' yer don't know nothin' at last. Git erway."

She patted his rough cheek and then sat down.

Len looked at her admiringly. "You are a noble little girl," he could not help saying.

"I don't know what that is," she said; "but ef you say I am, I hope I am."

"Ned," said the old man, "take ther shovel an' throw some ov ther coals on top, an' ther fire'll burn better."

"Bless me, I left ther shovel out yander!" I'll git it in er minit."

She darted out of the house. The old man turned to Len and said, "She left ther shovel under ther apple-tree—ther only one on the place—whar her mother is buried. When er snow falls Ned allus shovels it offen ther grave. In ther summ'er time she allus keeps flowers on the grave, an' yer mer go thar right now an' yer'll find pieces uv dishes an' bits of nice-lookin' pieces uv rags whut ther neighbors have give her. In ther night when it sleets she talks erbout it, an' I've knowed her the coldes' night that ever blowed ter git outen bed an' kiver that grave with planks. Confound this infernal damned thing ter ther all-fired devil!" he howled, drawing up his legs. "Wush I wuz in hell." He writhed in his chair and cursed.

"Can't you do nothing for it?" Len asked not knowing what else to say.

The old man turned upon him with a scowl. "Do anythin fur it!" he yelled. "W'y, damn your skin, do yer think I'd set here in misery ef I could do anything fur it! Yer talk like yer'd lost whut little sense yer ever did have. Do anything tur it, ther devil!"

"I merely—"

"Yer merely talk like er fool, that's whut yer merely do."

"Now, dad, I'll fix it," said Ned, as she bounded into the room.

"Wall, but confound it, don't shake ther house down."

"Let me attend to it," said Len, as he took the shovel. "How long have you had rheumatism, Mr. Hobdy?" he asked, when he had thrown up the coals and stood the shovel against the wall.

"How long has Adam been dead?" he ejaculated.

"Well," said Len, smiling at Ned, "the best authorities agree that he has been dead several years."

"Well, then ther best erthorities ergree that I've had the rheumatiz ever since I tuck sick. Sometimes I think that I wuz bornd with it. It strikes me all uv a sudden an' it leaves me thater way. My legs don't swell none, yer see. This last spell has been a putty tough one. Arter while it'll hit my heart, an' then Ned can put things on my grave."

"Dad, please don't talk thater way."

"Wall, it will, an' whut's ther use'n gittin' out'n it. Thar, it's easin' down. I tell yer, Mr. Gansett, it's awful. Er man ken suffer tell he ain't got no sense. Thank God," he added, as he stretched his legs, "it's goin' erway. Neddie, thar's some blackberry cordial up thar in the cubbo'd. Give Mr. Gansett some of it."

"No, thank you," Len replied; "I never drink anything."

"It won't hurt yer, sir. Yer gran'maw made it."

"I don't doubt its excellence, but I do not care for any."

"Then give me a swallow uv it, Ned. No, never mind. I am well enough off without it. I am glad to see yer, Mr. Gansett, an' I hope yer'll make yerse'f at home. We ain't well fixed fur entertainin' uv comp'ny, but as yer air not stuck up yer air willin' ter make 'lowances. Ned-

die, dear, it's erbout time yer wuz gittin' suthin' ter eat, fur I reckon Mr. Gansett is haungry. We cook an' eat in here, as we hain't got no uther place."

"I'm not hungry," Len replied.

"Oh, but yer must eat with us," Ned declared. "It never would do ter let yer go erway without eatin' nothin'. I'll cut off some uv ther turkey an' fry it. Won't that be nice, dad?"

"Fust-rate. Mr. Gansett, thar hain't nuthin' like turkey steak—'specially wild turkey."

"Dad," said the girl, as she took down a skillet, "I'm awful glad yer pains have went away, for," she added, with a mischievous smile, "the bad man wuz jest erbout ter grab yer."

XI.

As Len was returning home from his visit to the Hobdys he came upon Braley, the leader of log-rollings and active enterprises where collaboration is entered into with such heartiness by accommodating neighbors. Mr. Braley was in the woods near his house, chopping down saplings.

"W'y, hello, Mr. Gansett! I didn't hardly reco'nize yer," said Braley, as Len approached him. "How air yer gittin' erlong?" he added when he and Len had shaken hands.

"Very well," Len replied, as he held his hands over a smoking fire which Braley had made. "Pretty bad time to cut wood, isn't it, Braley?"

"It ain't ther bes' time in the worl', lemme tell yer, 'specially with er axe so dull that yer could ride ter mill on its aidge. I woulder got up some wood tuther day, but I went over to help old Austin put up a stable, so ther cold snap an' snow cotch me with my coat off. I woulder chopped some late yisdity evenin' airter I got back home, but I had ter go over to Dogwood airter er ha'fer bushel uv meal."

"Ho, Buck!" called an ungentle voice.

"Aho, I'm er-comin'. He turned to Len and said: "Wush yer'd git under one eend uv this pole. Wife she's awful fidgety when she's in er hurry."

Len assisted him. "Now," said Braley, when the pole

was thrown down in the yard, "I've got ter chop it up in len'ths. Go in ther house an' I'll be in d'reckly."

"No, I don't care to go in. Haven't time."

"Better go in an' git er snack, fur yer'll be haungry ergin yer git home."

Mrs. Braley, with a soiled rag tied over her head, came out. She nodded at Len, turned and shook off a child that clung to her skirts, and said to her husband:—

"Hurry up, fur ther fire is mighty nigh out."

"Am er-hurryin' jest as fast as ever I ken."

"Don't 'pear like it. Mr. Gansett, won't yer come in?"

"No, thank you; I haven't time."

Mrs. Braley slightly wrinkled her long, keen nose, sniffed the air, and said, "Men allus have time. It's ther wimmen that ain't got time fur nothin'. I know er man that ain't got time ter git up er little dab a' wood when he sees er snowstorm er-comin', but he's got time ter go 'way from home an' piddle erroun' all day." Braley looked reproachfully at her. She sniffed the air and continued: "Ther good book may say that man e'rns whut he eats by the sweat uv his brow, but it oughter say by the sweat uv his wife's brow. Fur pity sake," sharply turning upon her husband, "ain't yer never goin' ter git that stick cut in two?"

"Don't yer see that I'm hackin' just as fast as ever I ken? Give er body time, won't yer? Ole axe is as dull as er froe."

"Why don't yer grind it, then?"

"Whut's the use'n grindin' it when you an' ther chillun take an' souse it in ther groun'?"

"Wall, ef we didn't use it thar'd be mighty little fire on ther place."

"Wall, wall, fur ther Lord's sake, hush."

"Who yer talkin' to?" she demanded. "I'll give yer ter know that yer kain't tell me ter hush."

Braley did not reply. He threw down his axe, took up the wood which he had cut and went into the house.

"Won't yer stay an' git er snack?" Mrs. Braley asked when Len, bidding her good-evening, turned to go away.

"No, I thank you."

"Wall, yer needn't think we ain't got nuthin' ter eat."

"I don't think that, I assure you."

"Wall, I tell yer whut I wush yer'd do: wush yer'd tell yer gran'maw ter save me a settin' uv turkey aigs. I had a fine chance uv young turkeys last spring, but the varments got in amongst 'em an' took 'em bodatiously off."

"All right, I'll tell her."

"Whut, yer ain't goin'?" said Braley, appearing in the doorway.

"Yes, I must go."

"Wait till I git in a little mo' wood an' I'll go with yer."

"Yer'll not do no sich uv er thing," Mrs. Braley snapped. "All you study erbout is er chance ter git erway from home. I spize ter see er man allus wantin' ter gad erbout. Here I haven't put my foot offen ther place fur nigh on ter six months, an' nobody ever tells me ter go an' enjoy myself. I don't want ter hurry yer off, Mr.

Gansett, but ef yer air waitin' fur him yer mout as well go erlong."

Braleley pulled his hat down over his face, took up his axe, and with revengeful vigor attacked a stick of wood. Len turned away, and had gone but a short distance when he was overtaken by one of Braleley's boys.

"Say, thar."

Len stopped and said, "Well, what is it?"

"Pap says come over ter-mor' an he'll slip erway an' an' go er-huntin' with yer."

"I don't know whether I can come or not."

"Better come, fur he 'lows that he knows whar er ole buck uses. Ef yer come, jes' stop out in ther woods an' holler. Mur is in her tantrums, pap 'lows, an' don't want him ter go. Comin'?"

"No, I believe not."

"Hain't got no flat terbacker erbout yer, I reckon?"

"No."

"S'arch yerse'f an' see."

"I know that I haven't, for I don't chew."

"Pap 'lowed ef yer have, he'd like ter have some."

"Tell him that I haven't any."

"Wall, but when yer see him ergin don't tell him that I axed yer fur ther terbacker, fur he mout furgit that he tole me. Ef yer'll gimme er dog I'll come over ter yer house some time."

"I have no dog."

"Then I'll slip off some time an' come over ter yer house anyhow, fur when I wuz over thar wunst Miz Gansett give me er gre't big hunk uv sweet bread, an' it wa'n't sweetened with sorghum, nuther. Good-by."

When Len reached home he found his grandparents engaged in a religious discussion. The old couple were members of the same church, but in their established creed there were points upon which they could not agree. Mrs. Gansett, having suffered somewhat during the argument, appealed to Len.

"I'm sure I don't know, grandma."

"W'y, my child, it is as plain as daylight."

"Then why does grandpa not agree with you?"

The old man rubbed his knees, a habit with him when he meditated mischief. The old lady replied, "He won't agree jes' because there is so much o' the fetchtaked red mule in him; that's why. He knows that I'm right."

"No, Len, I'll tell you the way of it," said the old man. "The Bible bears me out in what I say and yo' grandma thinks that there is something wrong with the book."

The old lady looked searchingly at him to determine whether or not he were in earnest. The old man's face relaxed not a line of its gravity; and then the old lady, thoroughly convinced that he was not jesting, sorrowfully said, "Bob, I do believe that you air losin' your mind. You know jest as well as you know your name that I am right. A man may git religion away from the mourner's bench, but the Bible don't say that he kain't git it at the mourner's bench. It grieves me to think how far away you air driftin' in your ole age. I do believe that you'd ruther frolic then to pray."

"I'd rather laugh then to cry," the old man replied.

"It's a pity that you don't cry mo' than you do, goodness knows. I don't mine seein' a body in a good humor,

but I don't like to see a body always lookin' out for suthin' to snicker at."

"Better do that, Sarah, then to search 'roun' fur suthin' to grieve at."

"No you wouldn't, no sich thing. The Saviour was a man o' sorrow an' wuz 'quainted with grief."

"Yes, because His mission was sorrowful, yet with all, He did not command His followers to mourn. He said, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me,' and we all know that little children are full of laughter. Sometimes I think that the preachers would have us believe that He wanted the children to come unto Him so He could make 'em hush."

"Bob Gansett," said the old lady, "ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"I haven's said nothin' to be ashamed about. Oh, well, I was only in fun, Sarah," he added, as an expression of tenderness cast a warm glow over his face. "You know I wouldn't hurt your feelin's." He arose, approached his wife, placed his hands on her silvery head, leaned over and kissed her. She reached up and put her arms around his neck. "I wa'n'n angry with you, Bob," she said. "You know a heep better than I do, for you have got mo' sense about sich matters."

"Nonsense, Sarah. You've got mo' real hoss sense an' jedgment in one minit than I ever had in my life."

"I must get up from here and see about gittin' somethin' to eat," said Mrs. Gansett, arising. "That nigger has been a funterin' round in the kitchen fur two mortal hours, an' here it is after dark an' we ain't got nothin' to eat yit. I do know in my soul that some niggers air

the triflin'est things on the top side o' the Lord'ell mighty's green yeth. Turn me loose, Bob, fur I declare I must go."

Old man Gansett was much interested in "Robinson Crusoe." The book had been in the house during many years, but not until Len came and took it down from a shelf in the garret did the old man know what an entertaining guest found shelter beneath his roof. After supper Len took down the book. Mrs. Gansett was also much interested, but she pretended not to be. She had an idea that "Robinson Crusoe" was an ungodly, at least an "unchurchly," book, and sometimes, after becoming so absorbed in listening that her knitting-needles ceased their rattle, she would make recompense by suddenly getting up and busying herself with turning the churn, or hanging clothes to dry in front of the fire.

"Len," said the old man, "turn back there and read again where Robinson dug out that big cedar boat. You, see, Sarah, after workin' days and days on the boat, he found, when it was done, that he couldn't git it down to the water. That convinces me that the whole thing is true, for if it wa'n't he'd 'er got that boat down to the water in less'n no time. I want to get the hang o' the whole thing as I go along."

Len read the chapter designated by the old man. "Now, don't you see," said Mr. Gansett, "that it's bound to be a fack? Sarah, why don't you set down there now an' lis'n? You put me in mine o' a stray sheep, that don't know which way to turn."

"We'll all be lost sheep if we fool away our time with sich books as that 'un," the old lady replied.

"Why so? Simply because the feller ain't thinkin' about dyin' an' ain't standin' 'roun' a-snufflin'? It tells about killin' goats, an' didn't Esau kill goats? Hah?"

"He wa'n't no better by it if he did," Mrs. Gansett replied. "But go on with the readin', Len," she added; "you ain't a-botherin' o' me."

"Ef I thought the thing wa'n't true I'd fling it behind the fire," said the old man. "But it is true, ain't it, Len?"

"Excuse me until I get a drink of water," Len replied. He knew that if he told his gradfather that the book was fiction the old man's interest in the work would be gone. Old Bob, Len knew, denounced all novels as vicious lies, and knew that this great work of the imagination, side by side with "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "Don Quixote," would, in Mr. Gansett's estimation, share the fate of a "Sixteen String Jack."

"There are many truths—we all know of many that are not so reasonable as this book," Len replied, as he resumed his seat. "We can dispute almost anything or believe almost anything."

"That's what I say," said the old man. "Go on with the readin'. Well, for goodness sake, Sarah, you ain't goin' to card them bats to-night, air you?" Mrs. Gansett had taken down a pair of cotton cards. "Air you determined to kill yourself at work?"

"A body has to have quilts," Mrs. Gansett replied, "an' if a body has to have quilts, a body has to card bats, I reckon."

"Yes, but you've got enough quilts to do you to-night. Nobody's stold any lately, have they?"

"Oh, if you don't want me to card, I won't," said Mrs. Gansett, glad that she was morally forced to relinquish her design. "Go on with your readin', Len."

The old man sat with his head turned to one side. A boy could not have listened more eagerly to a fairy tale. All his previous reading had been dry discussions of creed, the exhaustive and voluminous research of men who knew how to fight for theory, but who knew not how to touch that great fountain of pure religion, the human heart. Mrs. Gansett resumed her knitting, but, after a round or two, she left one needle sticking in her knitting "sheth," that old-time, grandmotherly contrivance made of a goose-quill and a bright patch of velvet; and, forgetful of the duty which she owed to the "Wages of Sin," and similiar publications, gave herself up to genuine enjoyment.

"Hush!" said the old man, springing to his feet. "What's that?"

A distressing shriek. Len sprang to the door and opened it.

"Somebody at the gate," said he. "It's a woman!"

Mort Haney's wife rushed into the room. Her clothes were torn and her hands were bleeding.

"My gracious! Miz Haney, what's the matter?" old Bob asked before any one else could speak.

"O Mr. Gansett—Mr. Gansett—"

"What's the matter?—tell me!"

"Mort—"

"Well, what about Mort?"

"Jes' now some men come ter our house, tuck Mort

out in the woods an' hung him. Oh, for God's sake—" She sank upon the floor.

"Come, Len," said the old man, as he took down a gun from a rack over the door. "Git the pistol outen the top drawer of the bureau an' come on."

Len obeyed. "Sarah," said the old man, "keep Miz Haney here till we come back."

"Grandpa," Len remarked as he closed the door, "you'd better let me carry the gun. I'm stronger than you are."

"Stronger the mischief," replied the old man. "I ken fling you down the best three outen five. Le's take this short cut. I don't know why in the world anybody's got anythin' ag'in' Mort, for he never harmed nobody in the world."

"If I run on ahead, grandpa, I might get there in time to save him."

"Yes, an' you mout get there jest in time to get shot. Le's climb this fence."

They hurried along in silence. A screech-owl cried, and a fox, bounding from a patch of briers, struggled through the deep snow. The moon was shining brightly, and the woods were illustrated by white spots and dark shadows.

"Stop," said Len.

"Hear anything?"

"Thought I heard some one yelling. Yes; come this way."

The cries became more distinct. "They are whipping him!" Len exclaimed, as he rushed forward. The old man could not keep pace with him.

"What are you doing here!" exclaimed Len. Two men, throwing down something which they seemed to be using with much vigor, turned and ran away in different directions. Len fired his pistol, and old man Gansett, taking aim as though he were drawing down on a deer, fired his gun.

"Didn't git him," said the old man. "So much for small shot."

They found Haney tied across a log. "W'y Mort, whut's the matter?" Mr. Gansett asked.

"Let's untie him," said Len. "I'll have to cut the ropes. Now you're all right."

Haney arose to his feet, stretched himself, tucked his shirt into his pantaloons, and, as he took up his coat, said:—

"Whew! This is the hottest night fur sich cold weather that I ever seed. Got er chaw uv terbacker er-bout yer, Mr. Gansett?"

Old Bob gave him some tobacco. Len could not help laughing.

"Tain't much uv er laughin' matter," said Haney. "My back feels like it has been run over by er ox cayart."

"Whut does it all mean?" old Bob asked. He was leaning against a tree and was holding his sides.

"Wait tell yer get through with yer fun, gentlemen, an' I'll ter yer," Haney replied. "Yer ack like yer wuz at er show. How did yer find out I wa'n't enjoyin' ther best uv health?"

"Your wife told us," old Bob replied. "She's at my house now, an' I reckon we'd all better go there. Come ahead!"

"Ef I find out who my comp'ny wuz ter-night, somebody's goin' ter be too sick ter eat melasses," said Haney, as he walked along between old Bob and Len. "I hadn't quite got through my supper when somebody hollered at ther gate. I thought it wuz somebody that wanted ter stay all night, an' I went out. 'Bout ther time I got ter ther gate, er feller grabbed my arms from behine, an' jes' then some other feller flung er rope over me, an' then they both tied me. My wife she seed 'em erbout this time, I reckon, but she wuz too sharp ter run out whar they wuz. They had suthin' over ther faces, an' I coul'n't tell who they wuz. When they took me out in ther woods they tied me ercross er laug an' wanted ter know ef I'd leave ther country ef they'd let me off? I wa'n't prepared ter leave ther country jes' then, fur I wa'n't quite dun eatin' supper, so I told 'em we'd better argy erwhile. Well, we argyed. They talked hoarse so's I couldn't reckonize ther voices, an' it peered airner 'while that they had got ther best uv it, fur they 'gun ter cut some switches ter larrup me with. Wall, they had 'gun ter warm up ter ther work, an' I had 'gun ter git putty tired, when I heard suthin' go off, an' then I wuz untied. They cut ther blood ouden me; but never mine. thar's anuther night er-comin'. Ther worl' wa'n't made in er day."

"I didn't know that anybody had anything ag'in you, Mort," said the old man.

"Nuther did I; but it 'peers like they have. I never done nobody no harm that I know uv. While them fellers wud er-whuppin' me I 'lowed ter myse'f that it wuz er good thing I didn't have no chillun, fur ef I had they

mout git skeered an' set up er yell. 'Bout that time I could 'do ernuff yellin' fur er whole neighborhood. Er man don't know how loud he ken yell tell he gits a fa'r chance."

When they reached Gansett's house Mrs. Haney fainted. When she "came to," which she did after the application of remedies which Mrs. Gansett seemed to have produced by magic, Haney said, "Thar, now, set up here. 'Peers like I smell whiskey. Wouldn't mine takin' a snort merse'f." Mrs. Gansett brought a bottle and a glass. "Don't be afraid uv pourin' out too much," said he. "Ah, this is fine," he added, when he had swallowed the whiskey. "B'l'ever I'll go an' tell them fellers to come back an' whup me some mo'."

"Mort, yer oughter be ershamed," said Mrs. Haney.

"Whut good would that do? Folks are allus sayin' that er man oughter be ershamed when thar ain't no purticuler use uv it. I don't understand why anybody wants ter whup me," he added, as he shrugged his shoulders. "Some folks may not think it hurts, but I oughter know, fur it 'peers ter me like I've been thar. Puts me in mine uv when I wuz er boy an' had the sun blister my back when I went in er-washin'. Say, ef it ain't unperlite, I wush some uv yer would look at my back."

He took off his coat. His shirt was red with blood. "Look out," he said to his wife. "Lift it easy, fur ther shirt's stuck ter me."

"My gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Gansett; "the man is cut all to pieces. Let me go an' get some cold cream an'

put on it. Well, fur pity sake, whut merciless wretches they must 've been!"

"Never mind," said Haney; "I'll git even when I find out who it was. Thar's a passul uv fellers in this here neighborhood that's got inter ther habit uv goin' roun' an' whuppin' folks, but thar's comin' er time when they'll hear sunthin' that won't soun' like er pian'. I ain't er man ter growl an' cry over er thing that's happened; but mark whut I tell yer, somebody's goin' ter git it whar it'll do ther most good. That sorter feels like it," he added, when Mrs. Gansett began to apply the cold cream. "Gimme my coat. Now, le's go home," he added, addressing his wife. "I'm er million times obleeged fur whut yer've all done fur me. I hope them fellers'll come back ter-night. Ef they do, cold cream won't do 'em much good. It'll take salt, an' er heap uv it, ter keep 'em from sp'ilin'. Wall, good-night, all han's!"

XII.

"WHY, my dear boy, I am glad to see you," said Colonel Bently, as he opened the gate for Len. "Walk in and at once proceed to make yourself at home. All well?" he added, as he and Len shook hands.

"As well as usual," Len replied.

"Good: The thaw makes the roads pretty heavy, I see. Come this way."

They went into the library, a room inviting to any one who regarded books as congenial companions.

"You have been at work, I see," said Len, as he glanced at several sheets of manuscript which were lying on a table.

"Yes," the colonel replied, "I have been trying to grind out something for a paper printed in a town where I used to live. To me my pen is amusing, but not remunerative. At one time I had hopes of becoming an author, but after receiving many slaps at the hands of publishers I wisely decided that I was not intended to be a writer."

"Do you not suppose that you would have succeeded had you persisted?" Len asked.

"I think not," the colonel replied. "I had a double charge of ambition, but somehow I had not that deft touch which cultivation often fails to impart, and without which no man can be a successful writer. I had not the knack of moving characters. I could picture them well enough, but when they spoke they lost what little nat-

urality I had been able to give them. Have you ever written any, Gansett?"

"Oh, yes," Len replied. "I once wrote a story for 'Scribner's.'"

"You don't tell me."

"Yes; but it was not printed in that magazine."

"Oh, I see," said the colonel, laughing. "You doubtless had the forethought to enclose stamps for the return of the manuscript."

"Yes, I thought that the editor might want to open up a correspondence with me. The correspondence, however, was very brief. It was of a general nature,—so general, in fact, that it was printed on a slip of paper. I was sorry for the editor, for I felt that he did not know what he was losing. I sent the story to 'Harper's.' It came back. 'Magazine editors,' I said to myself, 'are peculiarly stupid this year.' I sent it to several newspapers, and at last I took it to an editor who published a country paper,—a sheet something like the 'Picket.' The editor said that he was rushed, but that if I would pay a tramp printer,—who happened to be on hand—it should appear, as Dickens would express it, in all the glory of print. I had only seventy-five cents. The printer agreed, for that sum, to undertake the enterprise. I stood near him, expecting to hear a complimentary ejaculation. When I stepped back to get a drink of water, the editor, who had scarcely looked at the story, asked the printer what he thought of it. The ungrateful type-setter replied that it was an average quality of hog-wash. I presume that somebody must have read the story, but no one ever spoke to me with

regard to it. I was certain that it would increase the circulation of the paper; but several weeks afterward, when the sheet suspended, I decided that it had not. Since then I have done but little writing for publication."

"You should not stop," said the colonel. "I believe that if you would take the characters which we see every day in this neighborhood, draw them just as they are, and weave them into a story, that it would be a success. Come in." Some one had rapped on the door. Mr. Honeycut entered. "How are you?" said the colonel. "You know Gansett. Sit down."

Mr. Honeycut seated himself, squirted a stream of tobacco-juice into the fire, stretched out his legs, struck his heels together, scattered mud and snow on the hearth, and said:—

"Sorter saft outside."

"It seems to be," the colonel replied, glancing at the mud on the hearth.

"Yas," Honeycut continued; "thought I never would git through Beasley's lane. Haven't seed Mort Haney sense he wuz whupped, I reckon?"

"No," the colonel replied. "Wonder if he has any idea who committed the outrage?"

"Not fur shore. I passed his house jest now an' wuz talkin' with him, an' he 'lowed that he wuz nosin' 'round an' would drap on somebody unbeknowin's. Oh, Mort's er keen un, an' I'd hate ter be ther guilty feller an' face him."

Mr. Honeycut "popped" his heels together again. The colonel, slightly frowning, said:—

"You'll get some of the mud off your feet if you keep on."

"Yas, reckon so. Mighty saft outside. Thought I never would git through Beasley's lane. Speakin' 'bout Mort, w'y' I dunno whut anybody'd want'er larrup him fur. I don't b'l'ieve he ever pestered er man in his life. Gansett, don't know whuther the ole man is goin' ter tend the bottom fiel' j'inin' Mort's, do yer?"

"I am goin' to cultivate it."

"Say yer air?"

"Yes."

"Yer'll have er happy time with the cuckle burrs. Have ter be er lettler perter than yer air now, I tell yer. Better let me tend it on the sheers."

"I'll take care of it," Len replied.

"Have yer han's full, I tell yer."

"That's all right."

"Yer won't think so 'bout ther middle uv June."

"I don't know what I'll think then, but I do know what I think now."

"Yas, I reckon so. Co'n'l, haven't got nothin' ter drink layin' roun' loose, have yer?"

The colonel, without replying, placed a decanter and goblet on the table. Honeycut took an immodest drink and said, "Don't yer indulge, Gansett?"

"No," Len replied.

"Wall, I do. Here's at yer ag'in."

He turned toward the fire, and stretching out his legs, again struck his heels together, remarking that it was "sorter saft outside."

"There is no doubt about it," said the colonel.

"Kain't be," replied Honeycut, "fur I thought I never would git through Beasley's lane. So yer air goin' ter crap it with ther old man?" he added, addressing Len.

"Yes."

"Yer'll find ther old man a pusher, an' er humper. I worked fur him one year, an' he stirred me early an' late. Ef yer work with him thar won't be no grass growin' un'er yer feet."

"I am not afraid of work," Len replied.

"I wa'n't nuther," said Honeycut, "but he come mighty nigh puttin' me through. Better let me take that fiel'."

"I have told you that I am going to cultivate it."

"Yas, that's whut I hearn yer say. Wall, b'l'ever I'll jine myse'f in ernuther drink. Here's lookin' at yer!"

The colonel, excusing himself, left the hoom.

Honeycut produced a flask and filled it from the decanter. "Er feller's got ter heel hisse'f," said he. "It's sorter saft outside, an' I wanter brace myse'f ag'in' I git ter Beasley's lane."

The colonel reëntered the room. Len could see that Honeycut annoyed Bently, and knew that the affable man's politeness was all that kept the colonel from kicking Honeycut out of the house.

"Co'n'l, ef thar's anything handy, I'll eat er snack," said Honeycut.

"You'll find something in the dining-room," Bently replied. "Go and help yourself."

"I don't see how you can stand that man," Len remarked, when Honeycut had quitted the room.

"Oh, well," rejoined Bently, "we have to put up with many unpleasant things. Sometimes I feel my fingers closing themselves into a fist, and I often have to put my left foot on top of my right one to hold it down, but I reason with myself. The fellow ought to have better sense, but somehow he hasn't. To tell you the truth, I am afraid of him, for I don't think that he would hesitate to set my house afire or stick a knife into me. I regard him as a very dangerous man."

"Well," said Len, "when it comes to that, you can be as dangerous as he is, can't you?"

"Oh, yes; but I don't want to kill the fellow, and if I were to make him angry I would have it to do or be killed myself. I'll tell you how desperate he is: some time ago, he rode up to a voting precinct, knocked down three negroes, seized the ballot-box, and, in the presence of a crowd of men, kindled a fire and burned the ballots."

"Why didn't the judges shoot him?" Len asked.

"They were afraid."

"I have never had anything to do with elections, colonel, and I don't know how hard a ballot-box is to hold, but I don't think that any man could take one away from me."

"Hush, he's coming!"

Honeycut reëntered the room. Len regarded him contemptuously, but the colonel politely invited him to take a seat. He sat down, clasped his hands back of his head and looked with a leer at Len. Young Gansett thought that he had never before seen a face so hideous.

"Colonel," said Len, arising, "I must go."

"What?"

"Yes, I must go. I merely stopped in to see you, not intending, really, to stay so long as I have."

"Stay to supper, old boy."

"No, I thank you. I must get back and help grandpa feed the cattle."

"I am sorry you are going so soon. Give the old couple my kindest regards, please."

The sun had gone down. The soft, glowing twilight of a Southern winter's evening tipped with gold the dead leaves on the oak saplings. Len stopped when he reached a point where the road wound its way along a great bluff that over-looked the river, and stood gazing down the stream. Cow-bells, with their tankter-tank-tank, made music in the distant canebreak; and away down, amid wild vines and dead weeds, the fox, preparing for a night of adventure, caught the sound of the bells, and waltzed grotesquely in the deepening gloom.

"Hello, whut yer lookin' at?"

Len turned and beheld Honeycut standing near him.

"I am looking at the river."

"That's whut I 'lowed ter myse'f, but er feller that's got a-hankerin' fur lookin' at ther river won't be much uv er han' ter tend that fiel'."

"Never mind the field, I'll take care of it."

"Glad to hear yer talk that way. Like to hear er man talk erbout work, fur thar ain't er lazy bone in my body. Mort Haney's been splittin' some rails fur thur ole man, hain't he?"

"Yes."

"That's whut I 'lowed. Them fellers done Mort up putty brown, didn't they?"

"Oh, well, now, Honeycut, I don't want to talk to you. I don't want your company, and you would confer a favor on me by—"

"Goin' erhead, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wall, hain't I got er right ter stand here as well as anybody?"

"I don't dispute your right, and I don't care how long you stand here, so you don't say anything to me."

"So good, erbody kain't speak ter yer, I reckon?"

"Yes," rejoined Len, "I am too good, or too bad, or too something, to talk with you."

"Hell uv er feller, ain't yer?"

"Never mind what sort of a fellow I am."

"That's all right, podner; we won't hitch. I like the ole man, an' wouldn't jower with yer jes' on his ercount. Made Mort putty mad when ther fellers lar-ruped him, didn't it?"

"Rather," Len replied, with a change of manner. He looked at Honeycut, and did not seem to be tired of the interview. A suspicion had arisen in his mind.

"Whut yer reckon they whupped him fur, Gansett?"

"I don't know. You can probably answer that question."

"How do I know?"

"You ought to know."

"Why so?"

"You were one of the men who whipped him."

"You are a liar!"

"Say," said Len, perfectly calm, "I wish you would be a little more particular. You might make me nervous if you keep on this way."

Honeycut laughed, and an owl, which had alighted on the dead branch of a tree not far away, hooted in refrain.

"Whut makes you—oh, say, yer wuz over ter Hobdy's tuther day. Ned is er smart little gal. Puttiest young un' I ever seed. When she gits old ernuff me an' her is goin' to marry."

"God save her from such a fate!"

"Wall, go an' ax ther ole man. She is gettin' erlong putty well now—soon be er-w'arin' long coats, an' it's 'bout time I wuz a-lookin' out fur er house ter put her in. Oh, her an' ther ole man is anxious."

"You are a liar!" Len exclaimed. "She can not but despise you."

"Wall, go an' ax her. I'll bet she'll tell yer that we're engaged. Oh, you neenter git mad an' stomp, fur it's er fack. Ther ole man tells me that ef me an' Ned don't git married airtter while he never will be happy; but that's neither here nur thar. Whut makes yer think I he'ped whup Mort?"

"Never mind what makes me think so. I believe it, and I am goin' to tell him so."

"Oh, yer wouldn't do that, would yer?"

"Go on, now,"

"Go on yerse'f. Young man, it hits me that yer air a little too big fur yer britches, an' it's time yer wuz tuck down er peg er two, an' ef yer fool 'long with me I'll do it. Do yer hear me? Hah, do yer hear?"

"Mr. Honeycut, I don't desire any dealings with you.

Our roads are not in the same direction. I must go."

Len turned to go. Honeycut exclaimed: "Hold on, old feller! Thar's been things said here that I don't like. Yer said that I he'ped whup Mort, didn't yer?"

"Yes."

"How do yer know?"

"Of course I have no positive proof, but I believe it."

"Yas, an' yer b'l'ever like ther ole feller over ther river. Look here, I ain't ther man ter stan' sich er dose as that. I don't mine takin' cast'-oil, but when thar's too much turpentine mixed in with it, w'y, I kick outen the traces. Uv cose I ain't guilty an' nothin' of ther so't, but you've got ter sw'ar that yer'll keep yer mouth shet 'fore yer leave here."

"You have convinced me," Len replied. "Now I know that you are guilty."

"Now, here, Gansett, I want to give you a fa'r chance. Yer ain't much mo' than er boy, an' boys is ap' ter be rash. Take back whut yer've said an' promise not ter say nothin' erbout it ur yer'll wish yer had."

Honeycut slowly advanced. "Keep back," said Len.

"All hell kain't make me keep back. Do whut I tell yer, ur I'll fling yer offen this bluff. I don't like yer nohow."

"Thank you."

"I hate yer, Gansett."

"You flatter me."

"Goin' ter do it?"

"No."

Honeycut seized Len. A desperate struggle followed. Len, with one hand, caught a sapling. The next moment Honeycut was thrown over the bluff.

XIII.

"GREAT Lord!" exclaimed the young man, with a shudder. He looked over the precipice. About six feet from the rugged edge of the bluff, on a bending sapling whose roots found scanty life among the crevices of the rocks, sat Mr. Honeycut. He had fallen astride the sapling, and had had the presence of mind to hold on and make his seat secure.

"Thank God!" said Len.

"That's all right, young feller," Honeycut replied; "but don't roll er rock down on me."

"I won't. Is there any way in which I can help you?"

"Yas, jest say the word an' I'll climb up the edge. Say that yer won't shove me off ergin an' I'll soon be up thar."

"God knows that I have no desire to shove you off."

"That's all right. God mout know all erbout it, but I wanter know it too."

He climbed up. Len took hold of a sapling, reached out his hand and assisted him.

"I see that thar ain't much use'n skylarkin' with you," said the rescued man, as he began to arrange his "bed-tick" suspenders, which had been broken by the fall. "Now, lemme tell yer, I wouldn't have ther co'n'l ter know erbout this here frolic fur nothin' in ther worl'. He's been er mighty good frien' ter me, an' has he'ped me outen mor'n one tight place, an' ef he-wus ter know that I had tried ter floor you he would turn er

shoulder as cold as a Jennywery meetin'-house on me. Jes' let ther thing drap an' I'll pledge yer my word an' honor as a gentleman—an' nobody ken say that I ain't—that I never will bother yer no mo'. I am a peaceable man, Mr. Gansett, an' ef it hadn't been fur that whiskey that I slipped inter that bottle while ther co'n'l wuz out, I never wouder toch yer. What do yer say?"

"I have no disposition to renew the contest," Len replied.

"I know, but will yer promise not ter say nothin' erbout our lettle erfair?"

"Yes, for it is of no credit to either of us."

"Now yer talkin'. Gimme yer han'."

"Never mind," said Len. "We can never be on very pleasant terms, at least our relations can never be very cordial. Keep out of my way and I will endeavor to keep out of yours."

Len did not wait to hear Honeycut's reply, but, turning abruptly, walked rapidly toward home. His grandmother met him at the gate. It was dark, and the old lady did not recognize him until he spoke.

"Thank goodness, you've got back safe an sound!" she said, placing her hand on his arm.

"It is not late, grandma."

"I know, but I have been so oneasy about you. I never felt that way about you before. I don't know what put it into my head, but I thought you fell in the river an' was drowned."

When they entered the sitting-room old Bob, who was fanning the fire with a turkey-wing, looked up and said:—

"W'y, how'd you git out o' the river. Lenqubees?"

"I haven't been in the river."

"That's strange. Sarah throwd you in about sundown an'—"

Now, Bob!"

"Oh, yes, you did. You come in from the kitchen an' lowed that you knowed Len was in the river. You went on at a terrible rate, an' at one time I thought about norratin' it around the neighborhood. I told her that you would be along d'reckly; but no, she 'lowed that you was gone."

"The men folks never will understand the wimen folks," Mrs. Gansett replied. "I kain't explain it, but whiler go, when I was out in the kitchen, jest as I took a pan o' biscuit outen the stove, I thought that somebody was tryin' to throw you in the river. I let the pan fall an' run in here, an' Bob 'gun to laugh at me."

"Well, I am here, and with a good appetite for supper," said Len.

After supper, while Len and the old man were at the stable, looking after the wants of the horses the young man said:—

"I suppose you can keep a secret, grandpa."

The old man, hanging a lantern on a peg, looked at Len and replied:—

"Well, I have kept many a one."

"I promised to say nothing about it, and would keep the promise had not grandma's presentiment so impressed me."

He then gave an account of his encounter with Honeycut.

"Well, I'll swear, that is strange," said the old man. "I don't understand it. There is something strange about your grandmother. Sometimes she says I look for So-and-so to-day, and the first thing I know here comes So-and-so. Len, why did the fellow want to kill you?"

"I have no idea, unless it was that he thought I suspected him of whipping Haney."

"Do you really think that he helped to whip Mort?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know why—don't understand his motive, but somehow I suspect him."

"Who was the other one?"

"I have no idea."

"It won't do to tell Mort."

"Why?"

"Well, he's so mad that he'll go right to work without investigatin' the matter."

"I don't intend to tell him what I suspect. It is better to let him make his own discoveries and sum up his own conclusions."

"Honeycut is mean enough to do anything," the old man said. "He has never been known to do anything desperate, but ever since he was a boy he has been looked on as a no 'count feller, that would do anythin' mean. He is lazy as a dog, an' ef it wan't fer the colonel he would starve to death."

"Well, we'll not—"

"Hello, in thar!" called a voice.

"Well, I'll be hanged if thar ain't Mort," said the old man. "We'll be out in a minit," old Bob continued.

"How do you find yo'self?" he added when he and Len had passed out.

"Oh, sorter sore, but able ter be stirrin'. How are yer, Len? Wife an' me 'cluded we'd come over ter-night, as we didn't have nothin' else ter do. Men folks won't stay at home, an' wimin folks don't like ter. Soon be time ter bergin stirrin' uv ther s'ile, Mr. Gansett."

"Yes," old Bob replied. "For the last day or so I have felt might'ly like seein' the dirt turned over. Yis-terdy I caught the scent o' burnin' grass, an' I could hardly keep from ploughin' a few furrows."

When they reached the house they found Mrs. Gansett deep in the description of the impression which had come upon her that evening. "Bob an' Len won't believe me," said Mrs. Gansett; "but I tell them that they do not understand wimin folks."

"That they don't," replied Mrs. Haney; "that they don't. Mort he laughs at me when I tell him that I have that sorter feelin', but—"

"It's becace I ain't got no faith in it," Mort replied.

"Now lemme tell yer," continued Mrs. Haney, turning to Mrs. Gansett. "Some time ago me an' Mort went over ter Braley's, an' as we was comin' back, I says: 'Mort, somethin' has happened at home, somethin' awful.' 'How do yer know?' saye he. 'Cause,' says I, 'I feel that er way, an' I jes' know thar is,' an' bless yer, when we got home we found that somethin' had got in ter ther smoke-house an' stole the last midlin' uv meat we had."

"Wall," said Mort, "the meat woulder been gone ef yer hadnter felt that way."

"Yas, but I felt that way."

"Ah, hah!—an' ef yer'd er felt that way an' hadenter found nothin' missin', yer wouldn't have been so keen ter tell it. Come ter think erbout it, yer never tell me erbout yer strange feelin's till airter somethin' has dun happened."

"W'y, Mort Haney, ain't yer ershamed ter set thar an' talk that er way?"

"It's er fack. Ther other night, airter I wuz dun whupped, yer tole me uv er dream yer had ther night afore."

"I did have the dream, but I forgot ter tell yer erbout it in time ter do any good."

The conversation during the visit of Mort and his wife was chiefly held down to the unfleeting fact that the "men folks don't understand the wimen folks."

The next day Len went over to the Hobdy place. Honeycut's words with regard to Ned hummed, with wearisome repetition, in the young man's ears. Len found Ned in the woods near the house. He heard her singing before he saw her. She was sitting on a large log. One of her shoes lay on the ground, and, in happy carelessness, she waved her "stocking-foot" to and fro in the entrancing sunshine. When she saw Len she clapped her hands, jumped off the log, put on her shoe, jumped back again, and cried out:—

"Now, Lenqubees, I'm dressed ready ter see yer."

"I'm glad to see you, little girl," said Len, as he seated himself beside her.

"I ain't so awful little," she replied, giving the skirt of her ragged dress a petulant flirt. "Long time ergo

folks called me little, but now it's time for 'em to stop."

"All right. How is your father?"

"Mighty bad. Ther good weather took erway his pains; but yistidy he would he'p me wring out some clothes that I had washed, an' ther pains come back. I tried my best ter keep him frum dabblin' in ther water, but, child-like, he would do it. Men never does know whut's good fur 'em. Did yer come er purpose ter see me?"

"Yes."

"No, you didn't."

"Then, why did I come?"

"Jes ter be er-comin', I reckon."

"After to-day I cannot come so often."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to begin ploughing to-morrow."

"I'm allus glad ter see yer, but it is gittin' erbout time that folks was a-ploughin' ef they want'er do anythin. As dad is so uncertain, we kain't tend much uv a crap, but we're goin' ter do ther best we ken an' trust ter the cross-roads boys."

"The cross-roads boys?"

"Yes. That's whut pap calls ther rain in ther summer time when yer ken see it way cross ther field."

"Ned, do you know a man named Honeycut?"

The girl frowned. "Whut made yer speak uv him?" she asked.

"I mieriely want to know if you are acquainted with him."

"Is that all yer want to know? No, it ain't," she added, giving Len a serious look. "You hav hearn

somethin', an' I wanter know who told yer an' whut they told yer."

"Well, I saw Honeycut yesterday over at Colonel Bently's. We walked part of the way home together, and he spoke of you. He had been drinking, otherwise I don't suppose he would have spoken as he did."

"How did he speak?" she asked. Her manner had changed. An old woman could not have been more serious.

"Well, he intimated that so soon as you become old enough that—that—"

"That we'd marry?" she asked.

"Yes. It is not true, is it?"

"I'm erfeerd it is."

"What!—you marry that brute?"

"Oh, don't le's talk about it."

"But you must tell me more."

She tried to assume a lively air, but the effort resulted in failure. "Come, little girl, tell me all about it."

"Thar ain't much ter tell, Mr. Gansett. Ever sense I ken recollect I have been told by dad that I must marry Honeycut."

"Your father surely does not like the man."

"I don't see how he ken, but thar don't many days slip 'twixt ther time uv one tellin' an' ernuther. I hate ther man. I could kill him. I do b'lieve that ef somebody wuster kill him ther Lord would say that he done right. Many a time when we wus out uv meat I have seed dad give Honeycut ther last cent uv money in ther house."

"And to oblige your father you will one day marry Honeycut?"

"I hafter, Mr. Len; but I hope that I'll die as soon as ever I do."

"You are very young yet, and many changes may occur between now and the time when you'll be of marriageable age."

"Yes, that's so; an' it's that alone what keeps me up. I ain't smart with books, but outside uv 'em I ain't er fool."

"You are a remarkably bright child."

"Child," she repeated; "w'y, Mr. Len, I ain't no child. Let me tell you somethin'. I'll soon be fifteen years old. I'm holdin' my age back to keep from—you know what. Lemme tell yer. Ther other night I thought I wuz free. I drempt' that Honeycut fell in the river an' was drown'ded. I seed him as plain as daylight, an' then I seed—seed you, an' I thought yer tole me that Honeycut fell off the bluff. I almos' wush he had."

"And I wish now that I had—wish now that *he* had. Ned, you are a beautiful girl—don't turn away. You are the most beautiful creature I have ever seen, and your soul is as beautiful as your face. I am determined that you shall never become the wife of that beast."

"But dad says—"

"It makes no difference what dad says. You shall never marry Honeycut."

"How ken I he'p it ef dad says I must?"

"Let me tell you, Ned, if the worst comes I will kill Honeycut. I will take the life of a dog to save the life of an angel—chop down a weed to save a flower. Don't

look at me so curiously. I know the thought is horrible to you, but it is pleasant to me. I will take no advantage of him—will give him every possible show—”

“Oh, he might kill you, Len.”

“No, he could not. My cause will be the cause of justice. Ned, you cannot marry that man. He is a brute.”

“I know it, but dad says that I must. Honeycut was over here the other day, an’ after he left dad come ter me an’ says, ‘Yer love me, don’t yer, Ned?’—‘Yes, dad,’ I said, ‘yer know I do.’—‘Then yer’ll do whut I want yer ter, won’t yer—do it ter save me?’ I told him ‘Yes.’ ”

“How save him?” Len asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. Honeycut has got some sort uv a holt on dad; I don’t know whut it is, but dad has hinted ter me—now don’t yer never say nothin’ erbout this—that Honeycut could have him hung. I know that dad never done nothin’ wrong. I know it jes’ as well as I know my name.”

“Never mind, Ned, it will all come out right. Do you know that I would rather be killed than to see you marry Honeycut?”

“No, why would yer?”

“Because, sweet creature, I love you.” She glanced at him, burst into tears, jumped off the log and ran away.

XIV.

LEN stood gazing after the girl until she disappeared behind the house, and then he followed her. When he turned the corner of the house, Ned, who sat in the doorway, jumped up and exclaimed:—

“W’y, dad, here’s Mr. Len! Come in. We’re awful glad to see yer.”

She extended her hand and greeted Len as though many weeks had elapsed since she had seen him. “Come in an’ set down. Git up, kittie,” she said as she took a chair and shook it. A lazy cat suffered itself to be dislodged. Len, after speaking to old man Hobdy, sat down. The old man looked, with a pair of blurred eyes, at the visitor.

“How is your health, Mr. Hobdy?”

“Ain’t got none. How’s yourn?”

“Pretty fair, thank you.”

“Yas, yer ken well erford ter say putty fair when yer air strong ernuff to fling down er two-year-ole bull. Ever’body but me ken be well. Reckon the Lord’ulmighty’s got er spite at me. Don’t know why, fur I ain’t never done nothin’ agin him.”

“Oh, you’ll come out all right,” Len replied.

The old man frowned until his ragged brows almost hid his blurred eyes and rejoined: “Yas, like hell.”

“Now, jes’ do lissun at dad,” said the girl. “Ther bad man’ll git yer, mine ef he don’t.”

"Damn ther bad man!" howled the old man as he drew up one leg and wrinkled his nose.

"Never mine," the girl went on; "one uv these here days yer'll hear suthin' comin' down ther road like er two-hoss wagin, an' when yer look up yer'll see ther ole bad man er-comin' erlong, knockin' his hoofs tergether."

"Oh, hush up with yer nonsense! When air yer goin' over ter Johnson's airter that milk?"

"Goin' right now," she said as she took down a yellow pitcher from a shelf.

"I'll go with you," Len remarked.

"No yer won't," she replied. "I want yer ter stay with dad till I come back ter keep ther bad man from gittin' him."

"Well, I'll stay," said Len.

When she had gone Len turned to Hobdy and asked, "Do you know a man named Honeycut?"

The old man stared at Len and replied, "Yas, damn him!"

"You don't seem to like him."

"He's er good man in his place," said Hobdy.

"Where is his place?"

"In hell!" the old man exclaimed.

"The other day, while I looked at Honeycut," Len remarked, "I wondered how any woman could ever love him."

"Who said any woman loved him?"

"Nobody, but I thought that he might, after a while, get married. I don't see, though, how any father could ever give his consent to—"

The old man, uttering a violent oath, turned upon his visitor, and said:—

“Thar’s a damn sight ub things yer don’t see. Whut makes yer talk thater way ter me, say?”

“Oh, I was merely expressing my opinion with regard to—to—”

“Yer air tryin’ ter pry inter suthin’ that don’ con-carn yer, young feller. Why do yer wanter come roun’ here ’spressin’ sich ’pinions ter me?”

“I am very free in expressing my opinion of such a man as Honeycut.”

“Yas, but whut ther hell do I kere, say?”

“Of course I didn’t know how you stood with regard to the man.”

“Do yer know whut I believe?”

“Can’t say that I do.”

“Wall, I’ll tell yer. I b’l’ev’e that yer air er young liar.”

“Then I am fortunate in not being an old one.”

The old man cackled, blew his nose, and, after a few moments, said:—

“Gansett, I ruther like yer. Thar’s suthin’ erbout yer that I never seed erbout no other feller, but let me tell yer, I don’t want yer ter talk ter me erbout that feller Honeycut. He makes my life miserable. Without him I could laugh at ther rheumatiz, but the rheumatiz an’ that feller tergether knocks me.”

“Mr. Hobdy, I don’t want you to think that I am prying into your affairs, but let me tell you that I love your daughter. Hold on, now, and let me get through.

She has given me to understand that she is to be the wife—”

“I’ll smack her jaws!” exclaimed the old man.

“Oh, no, don’t do that. She knew that I would not tell any one—or at least thought as much. Tell me about the matter. If Honeycut has you in his power, we must—”

The old man raved. Len sat, quietly regarding him.

“Tell me all about it, Mr. Hobdy. It is my idea—my entrancing dream—to send Ned to school, and then, at the proper time, if she loves me, marry her. Don’t rave so. Act like a man. It would be an unpardonable sin to sacrifice that child. Come, now, sit down and calm yourself. Make haste, for Ned will be back pretty soon.”

The old man had arisen and was hobbling about the room. At one time he seized his crutch and drew it back as though he would strike his visitor, but Len, not in the least disturbed, calmly looked at him.

“Sit down. If you continue to cut such capers the rheumatism will come down on you like a wolf on the fold.”

The old man sat down. Len continued: “In thus holding out against a course which reason suggests, you do not exercise that strong natural sense with which nature seems to have endowed you.”

“Air yer in earnest, Gansett?” the old man asked.

“Of course I am. What object could I have in knowing your secret if—”

“Wall, wall, I’ll tell yer, but don’t never let Honeycut find it out. Mebbe as smart er young feller as you

air could he'p me. Lemme think a minit. Watch out fur Ned."

For a few moments he sat in silence. Then, with brightened countenance, he began to tell his story. "Erbout nine years ergo," said he, "thar lived in this neighborhood a feller named Jim Buck. Me-an' Jim wa'n't friends. We had er fallin' out wunst erbout some cattle. I cotch him er-pullin' down my fence an' er-turnin' 'em inter my co'n fiel'. I rushed up ter him ter whale him, an' he snatched out a navy six an' told me ter dig dirt, an' I dug. Couldn't do nothin' else. 'Fore I dug, though, I tole him that I'd see him ergin. That evenin' he writ er letter ter me, sayin' that he didn't want no trouble with me. I answered the letter as best I could, an' told him that I wuz goin' ter shoot him on sight. Erbout three days airtter that, I wuz goin' 'long ther fence by ther ole Abner Cummins place an' ther fust thing I knowed I heard a gun go off. I 'lowed, uv co'se, that some feller wuz er huntin' squirrels, an' didn't pay no 'tention ter it, tell all uv er sudden I come up ter Jim Buck, layin' dead. While I stood lookin' at him, who should come up but Honeycut. 'Whut made yer kill him?' says he. 'I never done it,' I said. 'Wall, now,' Honeycut went on; 'me an' him wuz fust-rate frien's, an' ther tuther day he showed me a letter whar yer said yer wuz gwine ter shoot him on sight, an' I've got ther letter right here in my pocket an' it's ernuff ter hang yer on.' I could er killed Honeycut as free as look at him, but strange ter say I had forgot my pistol. I saw that he had me, an' I begged him ter gin me ther letter, but he wouldn't do it. He said that ef I would

berhave merself he wouldn't tell on me. I didn't know whut else ter do, an' I promised ter berhave. He said he would hafter have er little change now an' then, 'an' say,' said he, 'thar's one thing yer've got ter un'erstan'. When that little gal uv yourn comes uv age, I want her.' I 'gun ter cuss, but it wa'n't no use. 'I'll see that yer don't git erway frum me,' he said, 'an' ter keep yer frum hurtin' me I'll sw'ar out er peace warrant ergin yer.' Then he went erway, an' sorer than er stone bruise I went home. The coroner hil er inquest, but couldn't find out who done ther killin'. Nobody, not even ther nigger that had fotch me ther letter frum Buck, knowed that thar wuz any diffunee betwixt us. Sence then Honeycut has tuck erbout all ther money I could rake an' scrape. Many er time I have thought erbout killin' him, but he has tuck purticular pains ter tell folks that I would like ter kill him 'cause Ned loved him. Life is sweet, Mr. Gansett, even ter er ole man that's got ther rheumatiz. I have studied over it till I am almos' crazy, an' I don't know what ter do. What do yer think uv it?"

"It is a desperate state of affairs," Len replied; "but the girl must be saved."

"But how? If we try to save her I will be hung fur murder. It won't do ter say nothin' ter Honeycut erbout it— Here comes Ned. Yas, ther sheep in this here country don't 'peer ter— Git ther milk?"

"Didn't have none, dad."

"They never have none when we want it."

"Mr. Len," said the girl, "I thought yer would be gone ag'in' I got back, but yer ain't."

"Were you in hopes that I would be gone?"

"Oh, I didn't say that. The day is so bright I don't see how a body can stay in ther house."

"Well," said Len, arising, "I must go. When you get able, Mr. Hobdy, I'd like to see you over at grandpa's; and, Ned, as you are able—"

"Oh, I'm comin' over airtter while. Good-by."

After going some distance Len looked back Ned was standing in the door, watching him.

"That child," mused the young man, "makes this whole neighborhood bright. She is the most beautiful creature in the world. Honeycut—I am almost sorry that I did not kill him when I threw him over the bluff. Old man Hobdy is weak."

He turned into the country road and had gone some distance when some one called out:—

"Hole on an' wait fur good comp'ny."

Len looked around and saw Honeycut approaching. He did not stop and "wait fur good comp'ny," but Honeycut soon overtook him.

"Whicher way, Mr. Gansett?"

"This way."

"Yas, so I see. Hobdy's well as usual, I reckon."

"I suppose so."

"Ah, hah! Ain't changed yer notion 'bout tendin' that fiel'?"

"No."

"That's what I 'lowed, but yer'd better. Cuckleburrs grows down thar thicker'n ha'r on er dog's back—an' hot, w'y it's the hottest place on *re*-cord. Whut do yer say?"

"I say that I am going to cultivate the field."

"Sho' 'nuff?"

"I don't mind cockleburrs and hot weather."

"Sho' 'nuff?"

Len made no reply, but gave Honeycut a contemptuous glance.

"Don't yer think times air gittin' harder ever' year?"

"I don't know."

"Thought yer wuz putty well up in sich matters."

"I'm not."

"Sho' 'nuff?"

"Look here, this conversation is very uninteresting to me."

"Say it is? Wall, I never wuz much uv er talker, nohow. Didn't go ter school much when I wuz er boy. Mout uv gone, but ther old man didn't have much money. Say, have they warned yer ter work on ther road yit?"

"No."

"Wall, they'll be airter yer. They don't furgit. Turn down thiser way, eh? Wall, it's erbout as nigh fur me."

"I don't want your company, Honeycut, and—"

"Oh, I ain't goin' ter pester yer, young feller. I ain't never pestered nobody yit."

"Certainly not," Len replied. "You are one of the most innocent men I have ever met."

"Thank yer fur ther comperment."

"You are entirely welcome, I assure you. Who was with you when you whipped Mort Haney?"

"Now, look ahere, Mr. Gansett, we don't wanter talk erbout that. I thought that we had sorter went inter

er 'greement consarnin' it. I am er peaceable sorter feller, I am, an' I don't like fur er feller ter talk ter me thater way. I've had many er chance ter fight, an' I never fit yet lessen it wuz ther time yerse'f an' me had that little scrimmage. We're all right, though. I wouldenter throwd yer over that bluff ef I could. I'm one uv these heah sociable sorter fellers."

"How much farther do you go in this direction?" Len asked.

"Oh, jest as far as yer please."

"Well, my pleasure in this matter is somewhat limited. Our separation, on my part, will not cause a moment of regret."

"Reckon not. I see that yer air er feller that ken stan' disappointment."

"Now, here, Honeycut, we have gone far enough together. You go your way and I'll go mine. I do not care to associate with you, and if you force your company upon me you will have cause to regret it. I go down this way. Don't follow me."

XV.

THE time for planting the crops had come. Brush heaps burned in the new-ground fields. The wild-eyed hare sprang from her bed to leave her young ones to be turned over by the plough. Along the fences, bordering the woods where the sun warmly shone, lizards, with startling rustle, ran through the dry leaves; and, far above, the keen-eyed hawk sailed round and round, watching the chickens that cackled in the barn-yards.

Old Bob Gansett rigged up, as he termed it, a team for Len. The team consisted of a large one-eyed horse and a small mule. When the young man suggested that he would prefer a more respectable-looking outfit, the old man replied:—

“Well, when you wear this team out I’ll see if I can’t get you a better one.”

“You have given the negroes good teams.”

“Do you know why?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. A negro will often abuse a sorry-lookin’ team, but he takes a pride in a good-lookin’ one. He takes pleasure in curryin’ the mules, and in many other ways tries to outdo the other fellows. You have too much sense an’ too much kindness o’ heart to mistreat anything. The nigger boys are about done sproutin’ the bottom fiel’, so you ken go ahead at once. I’ve showed you how to plough deep by movin’ your back-band forward, an’ have in other ways give you all

the necessary instructions; so now put that old shoe on the p'int o' yo' plough, to keep it from gouging up the road, an' go ahead."

To Len the work was novel, but with his strong arms and quickness of understanding he soon "got the hang of the thing." The turning soil, when he gazed long at it, made his head swim, but when he looked away, and saw the birds chattering on the fence, he felt a thrill of pleasure. The head swimming passed away, but the pleasure of gazing at fair nature, just aroused from a long nap, grew less. His arms grew tired and his legs began to ache. Would the dinner-horn never blow? He thought that he would sit down and rest awhile, but just as he stopped he thought that his grandfather might make fun of him, so he clucked to his team and resumed his work. At last the dinner-horn sounded. He had often heard of the music of the dinner-horn, but never before had he realized that an instrument without keys could produce such a thrill.

"How are your legs?" the old man asked when Len, after feeding his team at the barn, entered the house.

"All right."

"Glad to hear it. Occasionally I'd look over in yo' direction to see if you had turned loose an' set down, but I'm glad to know that you didn't. There's only one way to make a man o' yourself, an' that is to stick to whatever business you undertake. Come an' let's eat a snack."

"I have noticed," said the young man, looking up from his plate and addressing his grandmother, "that the

plough is a forcible agent in behalf of hog's jowl and turnip-greens."

"Ah, Lord, child," the old lady replied, "a honest appetite is more to be desired than gold an' fine linen."

"Yes, but it is not so much sought after," Len rejoined. "But with me there has always been more appetite than gold."

"You are better off for it, my child."

"Yes, but people sometimes eat too much. It would be well to mix gold and appetite."

"People that work hard don't hurt themselves eatin'. I know I never did; neither has your gran'pa, fur he ken git outen bed at any time o' night an' eat."

"Len," said Mr. Gansett, when the young man had arisen from the table, "ketch your hosses an' go ahead. While the weather is as good as it is now you must hump 'em."

The novelty had already worn away, and hard, uncompromising, laborious fact had taken its place.

"Some one with the power of a Jashua must have commanded the sun to stand still," Len mused. "I am certain that it seems just as high at it was two hours ago. I'd like to go over to the river and catch some fish. Catfish are biting now. I must ask grandma if she does not want a mess. There's not a cloud in the sky. Bet it doesn't rain for two weeks; but why should I want it to rain when grandpa is so anxious to get this land broken up? If he knew my thoughts he would call me lazy, but I don't see why a man should wear himself out this way. Git up there! Getting tired too, eh? Well, you are not more anxious to stop than I am."

For hours the sun seemed to hang in the tops of distant trees. Slowly it faded, and then, like a ball of subdued fire, it sank out of sight. Len staggered as he walked toward home, and, forgetfully, stepped over imaginary clods. He was asleep by the time he touched the bed, and then, before turning over, his grandfather called him.

"Not time to get up yet, is it?"

The old man laughed. "Why," said he, talking from the foot of the stairs, "it's broad daylight everywhere."

"When you called me I did not think that you had gone to bed."

"But I have been to bed, and I don't think I ever passed a longer night."

"I know that I never passed so short a night."

"Well, hurry up and feed your horses ag'in' we git a snack ready. We've played long enough, an' it's time to do somethin'. Hurry up!"

Len was so stiff and sore that he could scarcely get out of bed, and at breakfast he was so sleepy that he could hardly keep his eyes open. His work was a painful drag, and several times during the day he was tempted to sit down and rest, but the fear that his grandfather was watching him spurred him onward.

How he longed for Sunday! "It used to be a very dull day to me," he mused; "but now it will be a day of enjoyment."

Sunday came as usual, but to Len it was not commonplace. He sat down in the yard and lazily enjoyed the sunshine. He leaned back against a tree and dozed off

to sleep, and had begun to step over clods and watch the turning soil when some one exclaimed:—

“Wall, ef yer ain’t lazy!”

Len sprang up. Ned Hobdy stood near him.

“Why, my little girl, how do you do?”

“Didn’t I tell yer that I wa’n’t er little girl?”

“Yes, but you are not a very large girl.”

“I’m large enough. I come over ter go ter meetin’ with yer gran’maw, an’ I thought I’d walk erroun’ while she is gettin’ ready.”

“I suppose I may go with you.”

“I’m goin’ with yer gran’maw.”

“Yes; but cannot I go with both of you?”

“No, fur we don’t want no men folks with us.”

Len insisted, but Ned was inexorable. The young man comforted himself with the hope that after her return from church he might walk home with her; but his grandmother returned alone.

“I won’t be outdone,” the young man mused. “I will go over and see her.”

He hurried toward Hobdy’s house, hoping to overtake Ned, but he was disappointed. He found Hobdy much improved in health.

“That talk I had with yer ther other day he’ped me might’ly,” said Hobdy. “I’ve had very little cause ter hope fur anythin’ in this here world—that is, sense that awful erfair, an’ now, even ter ketch holt uv er floatin’ leaf keeps my head erbove water.”

“Where is Ned?”

“Don’t know. She wuz here jest er minit ergo. I’ll step out an’ call her.”

He called, but received no answer. "I don't know whut could er went with her so quick," Hobdy remarked when he reëntered the house.

Len thought that he knew, but he did not venture an opinion. He thought that she had seen him coming and had fled into the woods. He was disappointed, heart-sick.

"You have not told me yet, Mr. Hobdy, whether you would be pleased with me as your son-in-law."

"Ef ever-thing could be cleared up I'd be might'ly pleased, but thar's a heap in ther way yit. Ned is a sorter curious girl, but she will do jest as I tell her."

"Oh, I would not think of marrying her unless I know that she loved me. I tell you, Mr. Hobdy, that I am terribly in earnest. Since the first moment I saw her a bright picture has ever been before me. She has laid a thoughtless hand on my life, and I must follow her."

"Hanged ef yer don't pear ter be in earnest. Have yer talked ter ther old folks erbout it?"

"No, not particularly. Well," he added, arising, "I'll go out and see if I can find her."

The old man did not object. Len went into the woods. He walked with as little noise as possible. He stopped when he came to a tinkling little stream, flowing, through beds of moss, from a spring, and, looking up the stream, he saw Ned, sitting on a rock with her face turned from him. He slowly and easily approached her. She turned and saw him.

"Don't run away, Ned!"

She had sprung to her feet, but his voice was so im-

ploring that she sat down again. She suffered him to take a seat beside her.

"Ned, why do you keep out of my way?"

"It don't 'pear like I do keep outen yer way."

"I mean, then, why do you *try* to keep out of my way?"

"I never did want ter be in er body's way."

"Now, look here, little girl, you know what I mean. Didn't you see me coming and run away?"

"I run part uv ther way an' walked part."

"Why did you try to avoid me?"

"Oh, I don't know. You must not ask me such questions, Mr. Len. I act the best I ken, an' ef I don't do ter please ever'budy w'y I kain't he'p it. Yer' tend like yer want ter see me, but yer know yer don't."

"There is no time, not a minute, when I am not delighted to see you."

She gave him an incredulous glance, shook her beautiful hair, and replied:—

"Oh, no, yer ain't, an' yer kain't fool me. It ain't wuth while fur er pusson ez smart as yer air to tell me that he likes ter see me an' talk ter me, lessen it is that he ken go erway an' make fun uv me."

"Ned, I wish you would believe me—"

"But somehow I kain't. Won't yer l'arn me how?"

"I wish that I could. I would give anything, do anything, to convince you."

"Wall, we won't talk erbout it. Yer gran'maw told me that yer have 'gun ter plough."

"Yes, I began several days ago."

"How do yer like it?"

"Can't say that I like it very well, but I suppose that I'll get used to it after awhile. Ned, wouldn't you like to go to school?"

"Uv co'se I'd like it, but how would dad git along? Who'd wait on him when his pains come on?"

"I suppose some one could be hired to do your work."

"That wouldn't suit dad, fur nobody ken please him but me."

"That may be true, but you must think of yourself as well as of your father."

"Ain't got time ter think uv myself."

"But you must take time, for there'll come a day when you'll wish you had. You can't live this way always."

"Kain't live no way allus," she mischievously replied.

"No, and you should not want to live this way any longer than can be helped. If your father should get well, and it now seems likely that he may, he will not need to be waited on."

"When he gits well I'll think erbout goin' ter school, but I kain't think erbout it now."

"But by the time he gets entirely well it may be too late for you to go to school."

"Why air yer so anxious fur me ter go ter school? Am I so awful ignunt?"

"Oh, no, you are not ignorant, but the brightest persons in the world must go to school."

"Ter keep' em frum talkin' like er nigger?"

"No, not exactly that, but to broaden their minds."

"I believe, Mr. Len, that I could l'arn ef I had er chance."

"I know you could. Your mind is as bright as a ray of sunlight."

After a few moments of serious reflection, reflection that clouded her face, she said, "But what is the use of sich hopes? A few years frum now an' I'll hafter marry Honeycut."

"Not while I am alive," Gansett exclaimed.

"O Mr. Len!"

"I mean it. You shall not marry that wolf."

"How can yer he'p it? What will become of dad? Oh, I know he's got some awful holt on him."

"Not as awful a hold as he'd have on you if you were to marry him."

"His holt wouldn't last so long, fur I intend ter kill myse'f as soon as I marry him. Then he couldn't do nuthin with dad, fur dad couldn't keep me frum killin' myse'f."

"You must not think that way. If anybody must die it must be Honeycut."

"Yer wouldn't murder him, Mr. Len."

"No, I would give him every opportunity. I would compel him to fight me."

"Oh, no, no!" she quickly exclaimed. "He might kill yer!"

"I would rather be dead than to see you his wife."

"But yer bein' killed wouldn't save me, don't yer see?"

"Yes, that's true; but I don't intend to get killed. Perhaps I may persuade him to leave the country. I see that Colonel Bently has a great deal of influence over him. Perhaps the colonel will assist me."

"Oh, yer mus'n't let ther colonel know anything erbout it."

"I wouldn't let him into any of our secrets, but would tell him to send Honeycut away, making him promise never to come back again."

Len had no faith in this rather romantic view, but he felt it to be his duty to say anything that would in the least tend to brighten the girl's prospects.

"Now, Ned, let me ask you the same question which I asked you just now. Why do you try to keep away from me?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Yes, you do. Is it because you do not like me?"

"No, no."

"Then you do like me, do you?"

"I kain't keep from likin' yer. Ever'body likes yer."

"Like me! Is that all?"

"Ain't that ernuff?"

"No, it is not enough."

"I thought it was."

"When did you think so?"

"All the time."

"Do you think of me all the time?"

She looked pleadingly at him. "I must go," she said.

"Not now," he replied, taking her hand. "Tell me how much you think of me and then you may go."

She looked into his eyes and said, "I love yer, an' love yer, an' love yer, all ther time."

She jumped down from the rock and ran away.

XVI.

MR. MANGUS DOCKERY, editor and proprietor of the "Picket," sat in his office deeply pondering over an exact piece of wording which he was spreading on a sheet, torn from one side of a paper bag. He did not omit the appliances, or rather the necessary performances, incident to a great literary strain, for he would occasionally frown like the corrugated elbow of a stove-pipe, would scratch his head, and nibble the end of his pencil.

"Think I've got it all right," he mused. "I'll copy it in ink to make it more binding. Let me see how it reads:—

To our worthy townsman, Mangus Dockery:—

DEAR SIR—There are times when all good citizens think deeply and wisely of legislation, and particularly of that legislation directly relative to their own community. For some time we have been casting about in an endeavor to find suitable timber for the coming session of the legislature. We could not agree, and were sorely perplexed until we became of one mind, and that unity of mind, sir, was our determination to ask you to come out as our candidate. We are aware of the fact that you have many duties and responsibilities devolving upon you as an editor, and that much experience and wisdom is necessary to the safe conduct of a newspaper, but we also know good editors are much more plentiful than good legislators. You might sell your paper to advantage, or might suspend it during the session of the legislature. An early reply will greatly oblige,

VOX POPULI.

"That will do first-rate," the editor mused as he proceeded to copy the "call." "I must disguise my hand for some incredulous fool might ask me to show up. The great fault of the American people is their unbelief." When he had copied the "call" he shoved back his chair and said, "I must answer this thing. It is better to strike before the iron is hot enough than it is to wait until the iron gets too cold. Those gentlemen, evidently the best citizens in the county, are conferring a great favor upon me, and it would not be courteous to delay my reply."

At the conclusion of an hour's hard work he had produced the following:

Vox Populi, gentlemen and fellow-citizens:—

I have maturely considered the call which you have been pleased to make upon me. I am at a loss as to why you selected me, for, as you doubtless well know, I have never entertained a political aspiration. I have always thought the responsibilities attendant upon the discharge of legislative duties to be too great for me, even though I recognize the fact that without a deep feeling of responsibility there can be no thorough, conscientious work. I have ever been a modest man, living in a modest way, and I was in hopes that I might be permitted to remain in my position of semi-obscurity; but, fellow-citizens, if it be the will of the people that I should go forth to fight their battles, I will throw personal interests aside, buckle on my armor, and submissively hearken to the voice of my countrymen.

"That's not bad," said the scribe, contemplating with an air of satisfaction the work which he had accomplished. "If this don't place me on a sure footing I don't know what will. Come in!" he exclaimed, spread-

ing a newspaper over the "call" and reply. "Why, helloa, Len Gansett! Come in. I was just thinking about you," Dockery added as he and Len shook hands. "What are you doing over in this part of the country?"

"Nothing, particularly. The ground is too wet to plough, and—"

"Yes, and you've got a day off. Glad to see you. Wish I could get a day off, my dear fellow, but I cannot. With me it is to work all the time, and when Sunday comes I am too tired to rest. Have you heard the news?"

"No."

"Stage robbed again last night."

"You don't say so?"

"That's exactly what I do."

"Was there much loss?"

"Several thousand dollars."

"Has Colonel Bently heard of it?"

"Yes, one of the boys went over and told him shortly after the stage arrived."

"He was deeply affected, of course."

"Hurt him, but he said very little in the presence of the messenger, but when he went into an adjoining room he swore like a sailor."

"I am sorry for him," said Len.

"So am I; but it can't be helped."

"Has there been any attempt to catch the robbers?"

"Yes, the sheriff and a party of fellows started out, caught up with the robbers, shot at them and chased them until about daylight and then lost them. But I've got something of more importance than the robbery."

"You must be going to get married."

"No, sir. Read this," lifting the newspaper and handing him the "call."

"What do you think of that?"

"I don't know. What do you think of it?"

"Well," said Dockery, after a few moments' reflection. "I think that it is pretty devilish strong. I have seen many a call, and I don't know that I ever saw one more to the point than this one."

"You are going to reply to it, of course."

"Reply to it—why, my dear fellow, I have replied to it. Here, read this."

"That does very well," Len remarked when he had read the reply.

"Now you're talking, Gansett."

"Have you any idea who wrote the call, Dockery?"

"None whatever; but I know that it must have come from a number of prominent citizens."

"Did it come through the post-office?"

"Yes."

"Let me see the envelope."

"What did I do with it?" feeling his coat pockets. "I am quite certain that I had it a moment ago. Humph, what could have become of it?"

"Dockery, are you quite sure that it came in an envelope?"

"What? Sure of it? Why, of course I am, when I tell you that it came through the post-office!"

"Oh!"

"Oh, what? Confound it, Gansett, what is the matter with you to-day? You talk like a detective. Damn it

what are you laughing at? Gansett, you may become a good farmer, but your chances of ever understanding politics and the literary graces of statesmanship are slim indeed. Understand, now, I do not say this in depreciation of your intellect, for you have a strong mind,—even though it lacks a certain sort of grasp,—but say it in a way of kindly advice, so that you may be warned of the numerous pitfalls which are hidden along your path. You—”

“Your advice is very good, Dockery, but I fear that I have not the grasp necessary to catch it at once. Suppose you write it out in the form of a call, and let me reply to it.”

“Gansett, you are beside yourself to-day. Do you mean to insinuate that I did not—or rather that I did write this call?”

“I don’t insinuate it, old fellow; I simply know that you did.”

“Len, if any other living man were to tell me that—well, it wouldn’t be good for him, that’s all. I am astonished at you.”

“Don’t let me wound your feelings, Dockery. You are not the first man who has written a call addressed to himself. You see I have not lived in the woods all my life, and am therefore somewhat acquainted with men. It is none of my affair, of course; but I don’t want you to think that you can humbug me.”

“Gansett, you are almost insulting.”

“I hope not. Didn’t you write that?”

“No, I didn’t. Now what have you got to say?”

“Well,” Len replied, “only that I expect to take the

stump in favor of some truthful man, a man who is not afraid to stand up and acknowledge the truth."

"Now, look here, Len, you couldn't go against me."

"Well, you heard what I said."

"Let me tell you, Gansett, that I am not afraid to acknowledge the truth. I own that I knew this call was going to be written."

"Now you are getting down to facts."

"Yes, I own that, and—but this is confidential—I acknowledge that I read the call before it was sent through the mail. Now, here, Gansett, I believe that I can make a confidant of you. It did not come through the mail. Len,"—sinking his voice to a whisper,—“I wrote it.”

"That's what I thought."

"Yes, that's what I did," the editor continued, "and I'll tell you why. A man of ability might stay forever in this country, might wear out his mental and physical self in promoting the general welfare of the people, and yet they would stand quietly by and see him go unrewarded. Therefore, realizing that I deserve reward, and knowing that no one is disposed to take the lead in rewarding me, I decided to take it myself. Don't give your old friend away, my dear boy, and rest assured that when I am elected I will discharge my duty. Do you know what I am going to do? I am going to save the tax-payers thousands of dollars by passing a bill reducing the salaries of State officers. The people are burdened with taxation, and it is my ambition to come to their relief. That's my ticket, and I think it will win. Oh, they've got a race-horse on the track this time,—not a

dark horse, but a horse that ain't afraid of the sunlight. What do you say? Hold on; somebody's at the door. Come in!"

Colonel Bently entered the office. He shook hands with Len and Dockery, and sat down on a home-made chair which the editor brought for him.

"Have any of the robbers been captured, colonel?" Len asked.

"Not that I know. It seems useless to attempt to do anything. The rascals, after doing their work, can fly to the river-bottoms and find a secure retreat among the cane. I have decided to advertise my stage-coaches—I have but two—and horses for sale. I cannot stand to be harassed in this way. Perhaps the officers do their best, but their best is very poor. To tell you the truth, I am disgusted."

"My dear colonel," said Dockery, "don't sell out. The country is improving all the time, and after a while there will be no trouble. I have received a call, from many prominent citizens, asking me to run for the legislature. If elected, I shall introduce a bill entitled a bill for an act for the better protection of stage lines. Don't give up, my dear colonel, for day is breaking. We have been groping a long time in the night, but a glow in the east tells us that the sun is rising. I do not think I speak boastfully when I say that my political chances cause the sun to rise for this county. You smile incredulously. Unbelief, colonel, is leading this country to everlasting ruin."

"Well, Dockery," the colonel replied, "if you run we will all support you."

Dockery sprang to his feet, seized the colonel's hand, and exclaimed: "Noble words, nobly spoken! I knew that I could count on your support, for I have ever known you to be a man who believes in bestowing reward upon him who deserves it. Now 'sir, to show you how much I appreciate your abilities, I open my columns to you, with the request that you express yourself with regard to my general fitness for the position."

"Gansett might help you, too," the colonel suggested.

"Help me!" Dockery exclaimed; "why, I should say that he can. My young friend is a writer, a writer with force and integrity. Turn loose, Len, and make a man of yourself. Oh, you can do it! With a little practice your style will blossom like the rose; and, above all other composition, political writing is best calculated to awaken vigor of thought and logic. Wait, gentlemen, until this call is published and then turn yourselves loose."

"Well," said the colonel, arising, "I must go. I came over to see if the sheriff had done anything, and now, failing to learn that he has, I shall return no wiser than when I came. Len, I have my buggy; won't you ride with me? Come on! I'm in need of company."

After vigorously shaking hands with the confident candidate,—and what candidate is not confident?—the two men withdrew.

"Says he has a call from many prominent citizens," said the colonel, as he and Len rode along. "Do you know who those prominent citizens are?"

"I think so," Len replied.

"I know," the colonel rejoined. "They are Mr. Mangus Dockery."

"I think that you are right."

"I know it."

"What are his chances?"

"Oh, we can't tell. After all, I don't know but he'll do as well as any one we can select. He is not a bad fellow."

"Were you in earnest about supporting him?"

"Yes, for, as I tell you, he'll do as well as any one. Let us turn out and give the fellow a chance. He is not inseparably linked to the truth, but I don't believe that he is dishonest. How do you like farming?"

"I can't say that I like it very well."

"How would you like to run a weekly paper,—the 'Picket,' for instance?"

"I would like it."

"Well, if Dockery goes to the legislature, you may take charge of the paper."

"He might prefer to place it in other hands."

"I think not. The office belongs to me, and if you will consent to take charge of it I'll put in new type, a better press, and employ a good printer. There are people enough in this country to support a good paper, and I believe that you can make a readable sheet. In consideration of his place in the legislature, Dockery will willingly give up the paper. What do you say?"

"I must say that I am delighted with the idea."

"All right. With this understanding I will go out and make speeches for Dockery when the time comes.

My main object, Len, is to help you along. I see that you are a young man of ability—well, I like you.”

“Colonel, I don’t know how to express my thanks.”

“Don’t try. I shall be rewarded if you make a good paper.”

“I will endeavor to do that. I think that I can soon learn to set type, and then the office will not be so expensive. Hold on! I get out here. Well, good-day!”

The young man’s soul was full of a thrilling thought,—the thought that the printing-office might be made a school for Ned Hobdy.

XVII.

HOT weather came. Len struggled manfully to keep the cockleburrs subdued, but they grew like Jonah's gourd-vine. Far down the corn-rows the hot air danced, and the buffalo-gnats, with their annoying sting, swarmed under the trees. The bell cow and the scrub calf ran with desperate rush through the bushes, and the horse, with a sudden start of terror, wildly threw up his head as the nit fly "zipped" him under his throat. Would it never rain? Dust arose in the field, and the blades of the corn were twisted like ropes. One evening the sun went down behind a murky bank of clouds, and in the night Len was awakened by a down-pour of rain. The next morning everything was fresh. The roses in the yard, no longer depressed by thirst, held up their glowing lips in perfumed pout, and the cedar-trees, which yesterday bore wart-like buttons, were now laden with fungus knots, resembling great yellow spiders.

"Too wet to plough to-day, Lenqubees," said Mr. Gansett, as the family sat at the breakfast table.

"I'm glad it is," observed Mrs. Gansett. "I'm jest glad it is, for Len has mighty nigh worked himself to death in that bottom field. Ah, Lord, child, you'll find the life o' a farmer a mighty hard one. Your po' father uster say that he would quite it jest as soon as he got three times seven, an' he did."

"Yes," the old man replied, "an' ef he had stuck to it he mout o' been alive yit."

"Now, Bob Gansett, what's the use'n talkin' that way? The Lord, in his own good time, called our son, an' no matter where he might 'a' been he would have had to go. Len, it sometimes 'peers to me that yòur gran'pa is a inferdel. He gits wus and wus all the time."

Old Bob winked at Len. The old lady continued: "The last time Brother Murry was here it was all I could do to keep your grandpa in the house while Brother Murry prayed."

The old man winked again, and said, "I like to hear a good prayer, Sarah; but it strikes me that Murry's got more appetite than religion."

"I reckon the old apostles had to eat."

"Yes, but they didn't go 'round the country for that special purpose."

"Oh!" with a sigh, "I know you would muzzle the ox that treadeth out the grain."

"It's all right about the ox that treadeth out the grain, Sarah. I don't want to muzzle him; but then I don't think it's right to take the halter off of a calf an' turn him in the field."

"Bob Gansett, you sha'n't compare Brother Murry to a calf, for I won't have it. Just look how he has built up the circuit sence he come here."

"Oh, yes, that's well enough. He's built one log-house and patched up another, and—well, he's done well enough. He's a good, strong, healthy man, and generally eats what is set before him. If he'd take that

appetite o' hisn to some big town he could sell it for enough money to build several churches."

"For the goodness' sake, hush! If I didn't have no mo' religion than you let on like you've got I'd stop goin' to church. Len, have another cup of coffee. It'll be a long time till dinner."

"It won't be so long to-day, grandma," Len replied. "It's too wet to plough."

Old man Gansett laughed. Mrs. Gansett, slowly shaking her head, remarked:—

"Your gran'pa would like to see ever'budy work themselves to death. It's a wonder he ain't wore himself out to a frazzle long ago. I reckon you'll be glad when you git to printin' your newspaper."

"Yes," Len replied, "I must say that I am looking forward to the time with more than usual interest."

"I am sorry to lose such a good hand," said the old man, this time winking at his wife; "but if you must go I reckon you must."

"Don't let him worry you, grandma," Len rejoined. "He and I have talked over the matter and thoroughly understand each other."

Sometime had elapsed since Colonel Bently had spoken of the newspaper project, yet Len had not told Ned Hobdy of his hope that she would consent to work, or rather study, in the office. He had seen her several times, but had not been blessed with an opportunity of explaining the plan which lay so near his heart. Immediately after breakfast he set out for Hobdy's house. As usual he found Ned in the woods. She advanced to meet him, but he failed to find the wonted light of glad-

ness in her beautiful eyes. She suffered him to take her hand and permitted him to kiss her.

"What's the matter, little girl?"

"Oh, ever'thing."

"Don't talk that way. Tell me exactly what the trouble is."

"O Mr. Len," she sobbed, catching his arm and pressing her face upon it, "I don't know what to do."

"Do about what? Tell me what is the matter, and perhaps I can advise you."

She wiped her eyes, put back her hair, and said:—

"Honeycut is at the house. I couldn't stand to hear him talk to dad about me, so I come away. Wait, now, don't you go thar an' git in a row with him. Please don't go!" she implored.

"I must go, but I won't do anything to make matters worse. Stay here till I come back."

Without replying she sat down on a log. Len hurried toward the house. Hobdy and Honeycut were in a warm discussion. Just before reaching the door Len heard an assertion that caused him to stop involuntarily and listen.

"She is too young, I tell yer," said Hobdy. Then the voice of Honeycut—a voice which when once heard could never be forgotten—replied:—

"She mout be too young fur some folks, but she ain't too young fur me. I'm er lady's man, myse'f,—a young lady's man. W'y, ole man, the gals all take airter me when I go fur er walk."

"Now, here, Mr. Honeycut, yer mus'n't make light uv this here matter. It's powerful serious with me."

"I ain't ther one whut's makin' light uv it, ole man. You air ther one that's makin' light uv it. Ef yer wa'n't yer'd send fur the preacher right erway."

"I kain't give her up yit. Wait er little while longer."

"Oh, that's whut yer allus say."

"She don't love yer, Honeycut."

"That don't make no diffunce. She ken l'arn that airter while. Oh, I'm a lady's man!"

"Yas; but, Honeycut, yer ain't got nothin' yit ter s'port a wife on."

"Wall, now, don't yer fool yourse'f, fur I've got some mighty fine prospecks layin' 'roun' loose."

"Wall, then, it's high time that yer wuz er gatherin' some uv 'em up."

"Oh, I'll git er holt uv 'em soon ernuff. I've been layin' off er day er two ter come over and fetch things down ter er fine p'int, but somehow couldn't git off. But I'm here now, an' I want ter know ef thar's er settlement in sight."

"Oh, I don't know what ter do, Honeycut."

"It's time yer wuz er-knowin'."

"You know that I didn't kill that man."

"Wall, ef yer think yer didn't we'd better take ther erfair ter cou't."

"Oh, no, no!"

"Yas, better take it ter cou't. I'm one uv ther best witnesses yer ever seed. I oughter be er jedge, I un'erstan' law so well."

Len, clearing his throat so that the inmates of the room might be apprised of his approach, advanced to the open door, looked in, and said:—

"How are you?"

"W'y, here's my ole frien'!" exclaimed Honeycut.
"Come in, Gansett!"

Len entered, shook hands with Hobdy, drew up a chair, sat down, and said:—

"Mr. Hobdy, I am making arrangements to take possession of the 'Picket,' printed at Dogwood. As you cannot afford to send your daughter to school, I thought that it would be a good idea to let her work in the office. Of course she could not do much at first, but I would pay her enough to enable you to hire some one to stay with you. By learning to set type she would not only know a good trade, but would, incident to it, acquire an education, more complete in many respects than she could get at school. I have not spoken to her, for I thought it better to consult you first."

The old man looked at Honeycut. Honeycut squinted, looked at Len, and said:—

"Wanter make er sorter she-devil outen her, I reckon. Er haw, haw! I don't know whut ther ole man thinks, but as his adviser in nearly all family erfairs, I must say for him that ther plan ain't erproved uv. I've been round er printin'-office some, an' I don't think it is er fitten place fur er gal. Thar's men ernuff ter work in ther printin'-offices. Ther gals mus' do ther house-work."

"You would never regret the step, Mr. Hobdy," said Len, paying no attention to Honeycut's opinion. "Some of the ablest men and women in the country have received their education at the printer's case."

"I wish Ned could go inter it," the old man timidly replied.

"Yer don't wush no sich uv er damned thing!" exclaimed Honeycut. "Er man what's had as many pains as yer have don't know whut's good fur his folks."

"Honeycut," said Len, "I am talking to Mr. Hobdy, and if you persist in shoving in your views I'll kick you out that door."

"Oh, no, no!" old man Hobdy whined. "Don't let us have no trouble here. Let him talk, Mr. Gansett, fur he don't mean no harm; do yer, Mr. Honeycut?"

"No, don't mean no harm, an' don't 'low that no harm shall be did. As the gayardeen uv ther gal I'd ruther she wouldn't go a nigh er printin'-office. Thar ain't no good come outen er printin'-office yit, an'—Come in, Ned!"

The girl entered and, without speaking, seated herself on the edge of the bed.

"Jes' talkin' about yer," said Honeycut. Ned made no reply. "I said we wuz jes' talkin' erbout yer," Honeycut repeated. "Gansett, here, 'lows that he's goin' ter take charge uv er printin'-office, an' he 'lows that he wants er gal erbout yer size ter go in an' l'arn the trade with him."

Ned quickly looked up. Honeycut, perceiving the sudden change in her manner, and slightly frowning as he noticed her glowing face, continued:—

"He wanted yer ter go in with him, but me an' yer daddy don't think that it would be ther best thing fur yer."

Ned, turning with an air of sarcasm and addressing Len, said:—

"Ther wolf allus 'pears ter have er int'rust in ther lamb."

"Now, Ned," remarked old man Hobdy, "don't talk that way. Mr. Honeycut merely give it as his advice that it won't do fur yer ter go. Thar ain't no purtic'lar hurry, an' we'll talk it all over some other time."

Len, as he looked at Hobdy, thought that he had never before seen a man so completely cowed. Honeycut stretched out both his legs, shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and insolently threw back his head.

"Yas," old Hobdy continued, "thar's plenty uv time ter talk over sich matters."

"No, thar ain't plenty uv time," Honeycut replied. "Yer'd jes' as well give er final answer now. I don't believe in foolin' erlong with er case like this. Gansett," drawing up his legs, straightening up and addressing Len, "me an' this here young lady, as I once befo' hinted, is engaged ter be married, an' I don't thank yer fur comin' roun' an' meddlin' in erfairs that don't consarn yer; an' now let me tell yer wunst fur all, ef yer want er water-toter an' flo'-sweeper fur yer printin'-office, w'y, yer'll have ter look fur one somewhar else. As they say in er 'batin' s'ciety, this here is all I've got ter say on ther subjec', an' I hope that we won't hear no mo' frum yer."

"I understand something of the relationship existing between you and the young lady," Len replied, "and I also know that the young lady's taste has not been consulted. In my office her duties would not consist of carrying water and sweeping."

"Well," rejoined Honeycut, "I don't kere how much yer know, so long as yer know it ain't none uv yer bus'ness."

"Well, we'll see about that," Len replied, arising.

"Don't be in er hurry," said Hobdy.

"Yes, I must go. Good-morning."

"Wait," Honeycut called, "an' I'll go a part uv ther way with yer."

Honeycut joined Len. They walked some distance before either of them spoke.

"Gansett, I thought that we had come ter some sorter understandin'."

"I am not responsible for what you think."

"Uv co'se not, but I don't know what right you've got to inte'fere with me."

"We won't discuss that."

"But we must."

"All right, then, go ahead."

"I ain't got much to say. I only want ter tell yer that Ned sha'n't go in ther printin'-office."

"I haven't much to say," Len replied, "but I say that Ned shall go into the printing-office."

"Wall, 'fo' that day comes, ther grass will be red in spots."

"That may be true."

"It won't be my blood that stains ther grass, Gansett."

"I am glad that you feel at such ease with regard to your safety."

"I know yer air er putty tough man, Gansett, but I want yer to understand that I ain't so mighty tender."

"That's all right."

"No, it ain't all right, Gansett. What do yer perpose ter do?"

"See that Ned works in my office."

"Wall, I'll see that she don't."

"By the way, Honeycut, have you seen Mort Haney recently?"

"No, I hain't; why?"

"Nothing, only he is still looking for the fellows that whipped him. I saw him yesterday. He had a Winchester rifle. Told me that every chance he had he devoted himself to the investigation of the affair which interests him so much. He seems to think that I have an idea as to who the fellows are. I haven't told him yet that you are one of them, for I don't want you to be found with a hole through your head. I am very tender-hearted in that way."

"Now, look here, Gansett, what's the use uv all this foolishness?"

"None whatever. I don't want to tell Haney, but I am afraid that I shall be forced to do so."

"Gansett, thar ain't no use'n us fallin' out. I don't know but er printin'-office would be er good place fur ther gal. I must think erbout it. I'm sorter slow in makin' up my mind."

"It seems so."

"Yes, but I generally git it made up airtier while. W'y, I tell yer whut's er fack, ef that feller Haney thought that I he'ped ter whup him—an' I didn't—but ef he jes' thought so, he'd fill me so full uv lead that I couldn't walk. Curious feller, that way. Wall, I turn off here. Say, I think we ken fix that printin'-office bus'ness. Good-by."

XVIII.

"YES," Len mused as he walked along alone, "I think it will be all right. Honeycut may not think so, but fearless honesty can generally overcome desperate villany. Poor child, how much she has to endure, and how patiently she bears it! What a heroine some writers could make of her, and in fiction how great society women would give her their sympathy, though they might see her and talk without emotion to her. This is not their fault, for they could not fathom the depth of her character. It requires a skillful hand to shake and arouse their emotions. I believe that Ned will learn rapidly. Free from the embarrassments of the school-room, with no 'superior scholar' to taunt her, she would devote herself to her task. I feel sorry for old man Hobdy, though it seems that if I were in his place—well, I don't know what I would do. To-morrow I must go back into this corn," he added, as he reached the fence surrounding the field which he was cultivating. He placed his arms on the fence and stood looking into the field. Hot steam arose from the soil. The corn-blades rustled with a sound like gentle waves. The woodpecker with his unmusical cry, fiercely pounded on the branch of a dead tree, and the bull-bat, with smothered bellow, darted at the flies that swarmed above the corn.

"Think I'll plough this corn one more time and lay it by, as they say here. Who is that, I wonder?" He saw a man coming down a corn-row. "Why does he

want to pull up weeds in my field? Why, helloa, Braley!"

"Hi, Len," said Braley, throwing down a handful of weeds and approaching the fence. Happened ter be comin' through the fiel', an' I jes' couldn' keep my han's offen whut few weeds I seed. I am er powerful han' thater way."

"How is your corn, Braley?"

"Wall, it is powerful in the grass. Ain't got much uv er crap in, but somehow it got ther bulge on me an' run bodaciously away with me. It wouldn't er got erway frum me, but durin' the last wet spell I had ter make er hen-house fur ole Patterson."

"Did he pay you for it?"

"Who,—ole Patterson?"

"Yes."

"Wall, no, ole Patterson didn't."

"Did any one pay you?"

"Wall, no. Yer see, I couldn't he'p doin' it. Wife, she didn't want me ter go, but as I had allus he'ped ther ole man I couldn't refuse him this time."

"That's all very well, but he should pay you for your work."

"Wall, he told me that when I wanted er mid'lin' o' meat I'd know whar ter come fur it. Wife, she 'lows that I'm gittin' lesser an' lesser ercount ever' year; but I don't think so. Wimen allus say that erbout ther men. Wall, I mus' be goin'." He took one hand off the fence, looked around again, placed his hand on the fence, and said: "I'm sorter pushed fur time. Never wuz in sich er rush in my life. Wall, I must be goin'."

He took both hands off the fence, kicked a clod, broke off a sassafras twig, put it into his mouth, and remarked:—

“Er man has ter hump hisself. He jes’ nachully ain’t got no time ter fool erround. Wall, I mus’ go. Wife, she sent me out ter git er mid’lin’ uv meat, an’ I don’t ’zackly know whar ter git it.”

“Why don’t you go to Patterson’s?”

“I would, but ther old man is curi’s erbout lettin’ er feller have meat. My chillun can eat mo’ meat than any set uv chillun I ever seed. ’Peers ter me like the fust thing they do when thep hop outen ther cradle is ter look airter er piece er meat ter chaw on. Mout ride all day an’ not find ernuther set uv chillun jes’ like ’em. Fine chillun, though! We never did think Tom wuz goin’ ter live.”

“Why, because he was so delicate?”

“Oh, no, ’cause he wuz so smart. W’y, when that boy wa’n’t mo’n four year an’ er half ole, he could fling er rock over ther top uv er tree as high as that hick’ry yander. Looked fur him ter die ever’ day, but he kep’ joggin’ erlong. He’s er snorter, now, an’ is er meat-eater frum erway back yander. Wall, I must go; but, ter tell yer ther truth, I don’t know whar ter git that meat.”

“Come home with me and I’ll give it to you.”

“Sho’ ’nuff?”

“Of course. Come on!”

“I’ll go yer wunst, anyhow. Say, I told wife that I’d go ter Patterson’s airter it, an’ ef she ever says anything don’t yer let on that yer know nothin’ erbout it. Ther

truth uv ther matter is, I got er couple of mid'lin's frum Patterson yistidy."

"You certainly have not eaten—"

"Wait till I tell yer. I wouldn't have yer say nothin' erbout it fur ther world, but ther truth of ther business is I got drunk an' lost ther meat in ther woods. I know I oughter be whupped, but I kain't he'p it now. I told wife that I didn't git none, 'cause Patterson wa'n't at home, but that I'd go back ter-day. I don't see how I come ter lose it, fur erbout ther last thing I recollect 'fo' gittin' home wuz ther tight grip I hil' on ther meat. Thar's somethin' powerful ther matter with me when I turn loose er mid'lin'! Say, when we git ter ther house, jes' git ther smoke-house key while I stan' roun'. I don't want ther old folks ter know I'm on ther place."

"All right," Len replied.

Len acted as Braley had requested, and soon the shiftless man, singing in imitation of the strange and weird quill-whoop of the negroes, strode homeward.

Len was astir early the next morning, not particularly aroused by an industrious impulse of his own, but drowsily, and, still half dreaming, got out of bed because his grandfather's voice, from the foot of the stairs, insisted upon such a performance.

The weeks wore on with that lack of incident which farmers from infancy learn to endure,—a blight on the rising spirits of youth, but a balm on the declining spirits of old age.

Young Gansett "laid by" his corn. He looked back at the last furrow when he had reached the end of the row, and, driving his horse into a fence corner, took the

plough-handles under his arms leaned back, and said:—

“I hope that this is my last furrow. I don’t mind work, but I do mind being a slave to a patch of ground. If I can’t make that paper pay—but I must, for Ned’s sake, make it pay. I knew that when all barriers were removed she would be delighted with the idea. Well; I must take this plough to the barn.”

Dockery’s legislative “call” had at first created great merriment among the people. They did not know that the editor had written it; but each man, knowing himself to be a prominent citizen, knew that the “call” had not been submitted to him. The levity soon gave place to serious consideration, for Colonel Bently issued a circular, declaring that Dockery was the man for the position. “I shall,” the colonel said in conclusion, “do all within the persuasive power of an earnest man and promoter of my country’s interest to secure the nomination of Mr. Dockery. He is zealous and fearless, and, what is most requisite to the character of a legislator, he is painstaking in the work of serving his friends. Therefore, good citizens, let us all turn out and nominate Mr. Dockery.”

The good citizens turned out and the editor was nominated by acclamation. Dockery was deeply moved by this outburst of patriotism, and, in a voice through which waves of emotion rolled returned his thanks to the convention. “Fellow-citizens,” said he, “on the spur—spur of this great occasion, it is impossible for me to express all I feel. I do not on this occasion claim to be a great orator, and if I were I could not find words to

express my feelings on this momentous occasion. This august—”

“September,” some one shouted. “Ther ’leckshun comes off ther fust Monday in September.”

“I know that, my dear friends. I say that this august assembly is quite enough to daunt the courage of a better-equipped orator than I am; but in the legislature, where I shall not be confronted by such learning and intelligence, I can put my foot on the neck of wrong and take hold of the hand of right. I don’t know that I can say more on this occasion. I gratefully thank you.”

The orator was loudly cheered, and when he stepped down he was seized, and, upon the shoulders of several men, was enthusiastically borne from the house.

As no other candidate appeared in the field Dockery was largely elected. In a two-column article he announced his withdrawal from the “Picket.” He thanked his readers for their generous patronage, and thanked his brothers of the press for their courtesy. In the outpouring of his regret at parting from them he forgot that the editor of the “Grange Standard Bearer” had called him a pirate, and that the editor of the “Mountain Cove Eagle” had threatened to whip him on sight.

Colonel Bently kept his promise. New type and a new press were ordered, and the office was fitted up in a way that caused Dockery to sigh.

“Now, Gansett,” said Dockery to Len, “if there’s anything about the business you don’t understand, why, don’t hesitate to ask me. By George, you ought to prosper here. You’ve got a good printer; cheap, too.

While I am in the legislature I will keep you posted, and say, I want you pay attention to me. I expect to make several speeches down there that will be of vital interest to my constituents, and—well, I'll write out the speeches and send them to you. They'll take considerable work off your hands. Oh, I know all about it. Many a time have I longed for a good, stirring speech,—one that scooped fraud and plunged a cold blade into the heart of corruption."

"I will not forget you," Len replied.

"I don't intend that you shall, for if you were to do so I alone would not be injured. My constituents would suffer. Well, you know that I shall remain here among my people until the last of December, and if during that time I can be of any service to you, let me know. I might, until you get your hand in, write your leaders for you."

"I don't intend to pay much attention to heavy leaders, Dockery."

"My dear young man, let me warn you against making such a mistake. A newspaper without a leader is like a man without a coat. What are you going to fill up with?"

"With local news, editorial paragraphs, amusing articles, and careful selections."

"That's very well, but you've got to have leaders. What the people want is strong political articles, mainly on legislative matters. What was it the poet said? 'We must legislate, we must legislate, or we must perish.'"

"Educate, you mean," Len replied.

"Believe it was educate, but it makes no difference—all the same thing."

Old Bob Gansett had a high opinion of what an editor should be. He had confidence in Len, and though he regretted to see the young man turn from a pursuit so useful and embrace one so ornamental, yet he was willing that Len should consult his own taste. He silently wished that the young man had chosen law; for in the country the lawyer, in his cheap broadcloth, is the embodiment of all that is wise. Mrs. Gansett knew that the pulpit offered greater advantages to a young man of education, and she prayed that Len might become a circuit-rider.

Early one morning Ned Hobdy presented herself at the Gansett farm, to accompany Len to the office. Her face was radiant and her eyes shone with the lustre of a new life. As she and Len walked along the road the young man began to tell her of his love.

"Yer mus' hush that, Mr. Len. I'm goin' thar ter l'arn, an' lessen yer promise me one thing I'll turn right roun' an' go home."

"I'll promise anything, Ned."

"Wall, promise that yer never will hint love ter me ag'in till I tell yer ter."

"Oh, but you might never tell me."

"Yas, I will when ther time comes. It may be er good while, but I'll tell yer."

"I'll keep the promise if it kills me."

"It won't be ap' ter kill yer. We mus' work like fightin' fire, an' mus'n't fool erroun' none."

When they reached the office, when the girl saw what

she had to learn, she clasped her hands in a sort of despair, but her face was soon aglow with determination. The printer, a rather old man, named Collins, but who was known to the Guttenberg guild as "Hungry Pete," took great interest in the girl.

"Get up on this stool," said he, "and I'll show you the boxes. Know your letters, I suppose."

"Oh, yas' I ken read er little."

"All right, then. First thing you know you'll be writing articles for a fashion magazine. By George!" he mused, as he turned to take up a handful of em-quads; "she's the prettiest creature I ever saw. Here, now," he said aloud, "let me sort up your case. Then I'll put up some big type, this way, so you can find the boxes. After a while you'll know the boxes so well that you needn't have the big type. Then you can take them out."

Len stood looking on. "I'll have to follow your advice, too, Collins," said he; "for I'm going to learn."

"All right, but if you don't mind I'll take the other stool."

"Help yourself. I'd rather stand up, anyway."

"Glad of it. Like to work with a man that would rather stand up."

"Where did you work last, Collins?"

"Didn't work. Hoofed it from one place to another."

"How did you find your way to this place?"

"Didn't find my way. Just happened here."

"I see that you are industrious, and I suppose you are sober."

"Yes, now I am. Why," turning to Ned, "you're

picking 'em up right along. Turn the nicks up, this way. That's it. Oh, you'll soon learn!"

"I hope so; but it's so hard ter pick 'em up, an' then it's hard to turn 'em loose in ther right place."

"Yes, but after a while it'll all be as easy as shelling corn. Don't try to hurry. Just take your time."

When Ned reached home, at night, she found her father standing in the door, looking for her.

"I'm powerful glad ter see yer," said the old man. "Seems like yer've been gone er month. Ther little nigger does his best, but nobody ken take yer place. Wall," he added, when, after kissing him, Ned had sat down, "how do yer like ther bus'ness?"

"It's awful pokey an' tiresome, an' I know that ef yer wuz workin' at it ther bad man would come right erlong an' nab yer. I know I'll dream erbout it all night. Oh, it does make me so tired! but I'll l'arn it, an' then I won't talk like er nigger."

"Yer talk like er angel," said the old man.

"Yes," she replied,—“er black one. I wush yer could see all the funny little things we've got thar. Ter look at them—so little an' curi's—would make yer laugh, but when yer went ter pick 'em up they'd try ter git outen yer way, an' then ye'd cuss till ther bad man would jump right in airter yer.”

XIX.

WITH dauntless persistence Ned devoted herself to her work. She soon learned the "boxes," but then it seemed that she was compelled to encounter difficulties still more perplexing. There were so many little things to remember, such exactness demanded, that the girl, scarcely able to correctly spell a word except by closely following her "reprint copy," was sometimes tempted to run away; but it was only for a moment at a time that her spirits would sink.

"Don't permit anything to discourage you," Len would say.

"I won't; but, Mr. Len, I ain't got l'arin' ernuff for this sorter bus'nness."

"The learning will come. You can read better now than you could at first."

"Oh, yas, an' spell better, too; an' after while I ken talk better. I study my books ever' chance I git."

"That's right. Why, just look, my proof is quite as bad as yours, and I have had the advantages of education."

"Yes, but you—I don't say *yer* any mo', do I?—you ken set—set—"

"Manuscript."

"Yas, you ken set manuscript an' I kain't."

"But you will learn after a while."

"I know, but after while is so long."

"Oh, not so very long. You have only been at work here a little more than a month."

"Yes, that's so. How I do wish I could set type like Mr. Collins ken!"

"Why," said the old printer, without looking up from his work, "you can beat me all hollow pretty soon. You have made wonderful progress, and it won't be long until you can correct your own galleys."

"I'll try it now if you'll let me."

"No, most too early yet."

"I know I'm l'arin' fast, for at night I read to dad. He thinks I'm the finest scholar he ever seen."

The "Picket" increased in popularity, and the circulation began to show a slow, but steady growth.

"Collins," Len one day remarked, "I think that I have at last found the business for which I am suited."

"A man that's a failure in everything else generally makes a good editor," the printer replied. "There's a Memphis paper"—pointing—"that has copied one of your sketches."

Len eagerly took up the paper. "Yes, here it is, credited to the 'Picket.' I'll take it home and show it to the old people. Here comes Colonel Bently. Come in, colonel!"

"Good-morning," said the colonel as he entered the office. "Gansett," he added, as he sat down and placed his arms on a pine table, "you are making an excellent paper, one that would reflect credit upon the intelligence of any rural community."

"I am glad you think so," Len replied. "Look here," exhibiting the Memphis paper.

"Well, I declare!" said the colonel. "That's a first-rate article, and I warrant you that it will go the rounds of the press. Ah, my dear boy, I knew that I was not doing wrong in establishing you here. How are you getting along, Miss Hobdy?"

Ned blushed and replied that she was getting along very well.

"What are you doing now?"

"Correctin' a galley," she replied.

"She sets a first-rate proof, considering her length of time at the business," said Collins. "I'm going to put her on manuscript pretty soon."

"Not till I can read better'n I can now," the girl rejoined.

"She is a close student," said Len. "I have never before seen any one improve so rapidly. I have realized one thing; that a printing-office, even though it be a small one, is a great school, as far as it goes, and that its methods are practical, although they are technical. I studied punctuation at school, but I find that the printing-office, in this branch especially, is far better than any school. A good printer, in the matter of punctuation, is better than an ordinary professor."

"Yes," the colonel replied, "the printing-office is a school—an excellent supplement; yet not broad enough to take the place of more systematic training. It only teaches one branch."

"But it teaches that branch thoroughly," said Len.

"Yes," the colonel replied; "but one branch, no matter how thoroughly it may be taught, does not suffice."

"I know that, colonel; but thoroughness in one thing

teaches thoroughness in many things. I do not mean that the duties necessarily devolving upon one in a printing-office can wholly impart knowledge, but I think that it opens one's eyes to the necessity of useful information; in other words, it teaches one to choose the practical, and to throw aside the impractical."

"Yet, my dear boy, there are thousands of printers who do not lift themselves above—who seek nothing further than an acquaintance with the direct appliances of their trade."

"Yes, for, as a rule, they are not ambitious; but whenever a printer attempts to enlarge his sphere he generally succeeds."

"That's what he does," said Collins. "If he can't handle ems in one place he hoofs it to another town. Don't know Fatty McGuire, do you, colonel?"

"No."

"Well, Fatty used to be the toughest in the gang—was a regular bum. Where do you suppose he is now?"

"I have no idea."

"Well, he's down in Texas, preaching. He's the best mourner's-bench solicitor in that State. When he opens up, the boys weaken. One night in Galveston he caught fourteen printers,—or 'comps,' rather," correcting himself. "Oh, no, the boys can't hold out against him."

"Good preacher, no doubt," the colonel replied.

"Good preacher—why, he's a rip snorter. I worked with him before he joined the church. Didn't think there was much to him; but when I heard him turn loose I just handed my hat to Long Tom—he was with me—and told him that I caved."

"I have no doubt but that your friend is a persuasive speaker," the colonel observed; "but don't you think that he would be a still better talker had he gone through a theological college?"

"No, sir," Collins exclaimed. "His familiar expressions caught the boys. He didn't quote Greek to show that his creed was the best. He said that he had been a woeful sinner; that he had fallen in love with Christ, not because he was educated into it, but because he couldn't help himself. Even in his longest sermons he didn't waste a single word. He had been used to weighing words in his stick, and he knew the heavy one from the light ones; and, again, he punctuated his lines. He didn't talk fast, but he took his time, and sometimes he would stop and make motions as if he had had manuscript on his case, and couldn't quite catch on to the style, but the first thing we knew he'd go ahead and make us shed tears. He didn't hunt for lurid colors to paint an awful hell with; no, he took a modest brush and painted love and trust all over the house."

"Did his homely persuasion draw you to the cross?" the colonel asked.

"Well, yes, and I run with the gospellers for some time, but finally I had to hoof it out of town. I hadn't gone far till I met Jerry Barnes, and that settled it. Jerry had a quart, and that started me on a little breeze. Roamed around the country awhile, and finally struck this town."

"You ought to go back to the fold," the colonel suggested.

"I can't now. Think it would take Fatty to bring me around all right."

"When the bad man gets you, you won't think of Fatty," Ned remarked.

"That's about the size of it," the printer replied. "No use of a man going back, though, unless he feels like it. Well, we've talked about long enough. If we want to get up this paper, we've got to pull out."

From time to time, just as often as the girl's consciousness of her own worth would permit, Ned's wages were increased. Every Saturday evening, with a pride which delighted her father, she took her money home. Len took but little money home. He regarded himself as fortunate if he were able to pay off. Gradually, though, the paper began to pay better.

Winter came on, and the honorable Mr. Dockery went down to serve his country. He waited until the house was organized, but he could wait no longer. Then he arose and began a harangue on the tax-burdened condition of his people. He had spoken during some fifteen minutes when the speaker informed him that there was no motion before the house, and that he was out of order. Mr. Dockery showed a disposition to argue the point, but a loud rap of the gavel overruled him.

Pretty soon he introduced a bill, wandering in aim and profuse in construction, asking special favors for the county which he had the honor to represent. The way being thus opened, bills of similar purport were introduced, until it seemed that every county in the State was praying for relief. It was unwise to pass them all, so, as a "starter" in a good direction, Mr. Dockery's

bill was "killed." The devoted legislator had written to several of the leading men of his county, telling them that the bill would surely be passed. When the great measure of relief was mercilessly and indefinitely tabled, Mr. Dockery sent a communication, of which the following is an extract, to the "Picket:" "I have found that this legislature is opposed to our county. It cannot be denied that I have taken the lead in affairs of this session of the Arkansas general assembly; and this being the case, certain jealousies have arisen to take away from me my well-earned distinction. It is as I have repeatedly said: the people are not careful enough in their selections of legislative timber. Small men hold small ideas; narrow men are narrow in their views. I have been told by old politicians that my bill was drawn up in a masterly manner. Of this I cannot say, but I do know that it was framed with the view of relieving my tax-ridden people. I have been honored with a place on the most important committees, and, notwithstanding the failure of my great and humane measure, I feel that I can accomplish much for my county and State."

In a private note to Len Mr. Dockery said. "I wish you would tell Mose Hardrider that I will pay him just as soon as I get the money. He has written to me three or four times, and must think that I am not good for the amount. It is not right to harass a man who has the cares of state on his mind. A man can do physical labor and, when he puts his tools aside, speak of subjects that annoy him; but, as you by this time doubtless know, a man engaged in mental work cannot put his tools aside. Therefore I wish that Hardrider would attend to his own

business. It is true that I am getting six dollars per day; but, Gansett, you know that six dollars per day to men in our standing is, after all, a beggarly pittance. I may never again mount the tripod; but, my dear fellow, remember that I shall, no matter where I may be, always cheerfully give you advice. I know that you are modest, yet I do not feel that you will hesitate to call upon me. Say, in your editorial paragraphs—and indeed you write them like a professional—give me a send-off. Tell the people that I am doing my duty and that I deserve reelection. Of course I shall not run again, but—well, you know how to fix it. If you should come down while we are in session I shall make a motion that you be invited to a seat on the floor. This will be a big thing for your paper, and will be the means of getting you a number of subscribers here.”

One rainy day when Ned had not come to town, and when the printer had, in consequence of being ahead, taken a “lay off,” Honeycut entered the office. Len was reading Dockery’s letter when Honeycut entered.

“Helloa,” said the visitor, stamping his feet on the door-sill, “how yer gettin’ erlong?”

“Very well.”

“Glad ter hear it. Got a sorter int’rust in ther office, you know.”

“You needn’t put yourself to any trouble,” Len replied.

“Oh, ‘taint no trouble er tall. I’m er peculiar sorter person that er way,” Honeycut added, with a yellow grin.

“Nobody takes mo’ int’rust in his neighbors than I do. Whar’s Ned?”

"Miss Hobdy did not come to-day."

"Reckon she stayed at home, then."

"I suppose she did."

"Wall, sar, she's gittin' so high up that I kain't hardly talk ter her. Ken talk well ernuff, but kain't hardly understan' her. Never seed anybody climb up in ther pictures so fast. I wuz over ter ther ole man's las' night, and Ned couldn't do nothin' but read her book an' talk erbout it. Putty smart gal, after all, an' will make er putty good wife, an' she's gittin' erbout ole ernuff now."

"I suppose," Len replied, "that she will consult her own pleasure with regard to marriage."

"I don't know erbout that. I reckon that when a man's engaged ter er gal he's got er right ter hurry up ther errair."

"Yes, and I suppose that she has a right to break the engagement."

"Sometimes yas, an' sometimes no. Yer've know'd all erlong that me an' her wuz goin' ter git married, an' I don't think that yer've got er right ter interfere. I ken stan' er good deal, am willin' ter put up with er heap, but I've got ernuff uv yer med'lin', Mr. Gansett. I tuck old man Hobdy off ter one side las' night an' had er long talk with him, an' he tells me that he's mo'n willin' fur me an' Ned ter get married. Er good man aughter marry er gin he's as old as I am, an' bein' er good man merself, I think that my time has erbout got here."

"I believe we had a talk about Mort Haney some time ago," said Len.

"Yas, b'l'ave we did."

"I told you, I believe, that he wanted to find out who whipped him last spring."

"Yas, b'l'ever yer did."

"I told you then that I knew one of the parties."

"Correck; go erhead."

"You were unwilling to give your consent—"

"Yas."

"But when I told you something, you consented."

"That's it."

"Well, if you devise any scheme for taking that girl from this office I will tell him that you assisted in whipping him."

Honeycut grinned, took off his hat, rubbed his head, and replied:—

"Ain't heard from Mort lately, I reckon."

"No, not very recently."

"That's what I thought."

"Why?"

"Wall, he don't kere now who whupped him. He's down with newmony, an' ther doctor said this mornin' that he couldn't live till night. Mighty sorry, fur Mort is er good-hearted feller. He's ready now ter forgive ever'body, an' I thought I'd go by an' tell him that I know'd who whupped him."

"You infernal hound!" exclaimed Len; "do you suppose that I will allow you to marry that girl?"

"Oh, wall, ther gal will do jest whut ther ole man says. Ther ole man an' me air good frien's, an' he'll do jest whut I say. Wall, podner, I've got ter go. Must go over ter Hobdy's ter-night. Say," he added when he had reached the door, "ef Ned don't come ter-mor' yer needn't be s'prised, fur ther mout be some marryin' goin' on putty soon. Good-day. B'l'ever I'll go by an' see when Mort's goin' ter be buried."

XX.

WHEN Honeycut departed, which he did after many knowing winks and not a few repetitions of a malicious grin,—a facial accomplishment which he had highly cultivated,—Len, in a perplexed state of mind, sat down and gave himself up to agitated meditation. He knew that in the event of Haney's death Honeycut would play upon Hobdy's fear until the old man would implore his daughter to relinquish her place in the printing-office. The editor decided to go over to Hobdy's without delay, and, with this idea in view, he closed his office early in the afternoon and set out for the home of the beautiful apprentice.

Occasional gusts of rain, in fitful sputter, came down. The muffled dove, high upon the dead branch of a tree, tucked down her head in resignation, and the crow, with cheerless cry, flew over the old field long since given up to sedge grass, running briers, and sprouts. The clouds were full of frowns and tears—angry meditation and violent outbursts of grief. The water, falling upon the dead leaves, produced a feeling which is nowhere felt save in the country,—the feeling that an old man has just been buried. In the winter, when the tall trees are bare, and when the saplings, with youthful attachment, cling to their dead leaves, the fresh clay thrown from an old man's grave seems to invite the rain.

"I hardly know what to do," Len mused as he strode onward. "I can tell the old man what a pity it would

be to take Ned from the office; but can I keep her, if he insists upon it, from marrying that wretch? Of course she would do almost anything to protect her father, but to yield to a fate a thousand times worse than death—well, the old man should not think of such a thing. But, after all, how can he help himself? His aim is to protect his own life; but can he not, and with defensible cause, kill Honeycut? Damn it, can I not kill him! No; it would be murder,—a murder which neither God nor man would excuse. I wish that the scoundrel would try to kill me! I believe it would be a Christian act to provoke him. So help me, God, yonder he stands in the road!”

Honeycut waited for Len to approach.

“W’y, helloa,” said he, when Len drew near, “whut air yer doin’? Tryin’ ter slip edgeways ’twixt these showers? Ef yer air goin’ my way I’ll jine yer. Been er-pokin’ round’ in ther woods ever sense I left yer. Seed one uv ther Tally boys jest now, an’ he tole me that Haney ain’t no better. Pity fur sich er man ter die, ain’t it?”

“Yes, when there are other men who so much more deserve death,” Len replied.

“That’s whut I ’lowed, an’ is whut I’m goin’ ter say at ther burryin’. Never seed me at er fun’ral, did yer? Oh, I’m ther cap’n when it comes ter burryin’ folks! Ruther burry er good man than ter eat. Better ter me than a candy-pullin’. Do yer know these heah woods is gittin’ dang’us? They air. Feller wuz tackled in here t’other day. ’Fore I left town er frien’ uv mine, big merchant, ’suaded me ter take this here pistol.” He

drew out a large pistol, looked at it, returned it to its place and added: "Wouldn't like ter shoot er good man, but he mustn't shove me. Hain't got er pistol, have yer?"

"No," Len replied, before he thought. He immediately perceived a change in Honeycut's countenance.

"Wall," Honeycut replied, with a grin, "when yer want one let me know, an' I'll 'commerdate yer. Powerful han' ter 'commerdate folks. My father an' all my folks wuz thater way. Look here, whicher way yer goin? Ain't that yer nearest road?" pointing. "Yer mus' be goin' summers else."

"I don't know that it's any of your business."

"No, not in purticular. Jest thought I'd ax."

For some distance they walked on in silence.

"Goin' over ter Hobdy's, ain't yer?" Honeycut asked.

"Yes."

"Whut fur?"

"None of your business."

"I reckon it is, though. Now, look er here, young feller, I want er tell yer suthin'. I want yer ter stop med'lin' with my bus'ness. I never have fooled with yer er tall, an' with me ever'thing went on all right tell yer come inter ther neighborhood. I reckon yer air er leetle stronger than I am, but gunpowder talks as well fur one man as fur ernuther. Yer needn't go over ter Hobdy's. I ain't erfeered that yer ken change ther ole man's mine, but yer mout worry ther gal."

"It doesn't make any difference to me what you want."

"No, an' it didn't make no diffunce ter ther June bug what ther duck wanted, but it happened that ther duck

wanted ther June bug. Don't walk so clost ter me. Keep off er leetle. This here pistol is powerful easy on trigger. Yer mout think yer could jump on me an' take it away from me, but yer kain't."

"It is against the law to carry concealed weapons," Len remarked, deeply regretting that he had failed to provide himself with one.

"Yas, ergin ther law; an' it's ergin ther law ter kill er man, yet folks do it."

"Murderers do."

"That's whut they tell me."

"You ought to know without being told."

"Why?"

"Oh, I daresay you might, to some extent, rely on your own experience."

"I don't know what yer air tryin' ter git at, young feller, an' I don't keer a damn, but what I said jes' now erbout not wantin' yer ter meddle in my erfairs is jes' whut I meant. Me an' ther ole man has got 'rangements that nobody but ourselves understands' an' which it would be sorter dang'us ter pry inter."

"Honeycut, your warning is wasted on me. It is like throwing sand against a suspended wire. None of it finds a lodgment. I know that you are a desperate fellow, and that if it were not for the keen interest which you feel in your own safety you would attempt to do me violence. I know that you are incapable of a manly thought or generous impulse, and, above all, I know that you are a damned coward. Just now I told you that I had no pistol. If I have told an untruth, pardon me."

Honeycut's manner underwent an instant change.

"Thar ain't no use'n jowerin'," said he. "Reckon a man ken talk. Jes' wanted yer ter un'erstan' that I didn't want yer ter meddle with my bus'ness. Ain't nothin' wrong in that, but here yer go an' git mad'n er wet hen. Ef yer want ter go over an' call on ther ole man, w'y, uv co'se I kain't keep yer frum it; but I ken keep ther gal frum workin' in ther printin'-office, an' I'm goin' ter do it."

"Well, we'll see about that."

"B'l'ever I'll turn off here an' go by er place whar I've got some business that needs tendin' ter. Yer won't be over at thar old man's many minits till yer see me er jog'in' erlong in ther cummunity. So long."

Len did not reply. He did not even look to see which direction Honeycut had taken, but, with quickened step, hurried onward. A nervous fear lay cold against his heart. When he reached Hobdy's house he found Ned, seemingly forgetful of surroundings, bending over a book. She looked up with a start when Len tapped on the facing of the opened door.

"Come in," she said, arising and placing a chair near the fire. "Why, how wet you are! What made you come out on such a day? Come over here to scold me for not comin'—coming to the office this morning, didn't you?"

"How could you come when the weather was so bad? Where is your father?"

"Gone to his trap. He'll be back putty—pretty soon, and maybe he'll bring some partridges with him. If he does, I must send some over to your grandma."

"What are you reading?" Len asked, taking the book from her lap.

"It's a grammar."

"Ah, hah, becoming more and more a student. Do you like grammar?"

"I don't know enough about it to tell yit—yet. It's full of awful hard words, and sometimes it gets as dry as a chip in August; but I stick to it."

"You can't do anything with it alone."

"Yes, I can, but I don't get along as fast as I could if somebody was to help me; but, after all, when I learn anything by myself I know it better than if somebody was to learn it to me."

"Teach it to you. No one can *learn* you anything, but can teach you."

"I'll remember that, but there are so many little things to remember. Here comes dad, but he ain't got no partridges."

"Evenin', evenin' ter yer," said Hobdy, as he entered the room. "Keep yer cheer. Wall, how're yer 'gittin' along?" he added as he and Len shook hands.

"Very well."

"Does my gal put yer ter any trouble?" the old man asked, as he drew up a chair and sat down.

"Oh, no, she does her work so well that it is a pleasure to have her in the office."

The old man smiled, looked at his daughter and said:—

"An' I'arn—w'y, I never seed ther like. She ken read now almost like er preacher. Fur some time she's been readin' me a mighty fine book that she got in town. It's all erbout er young feller that had a step-daddy that I would like to knock down, an er big ole feller wuz allus watin'—what wuz he watin' fur, Ned?"

"Something to turn up. The book is 'David Copperfield.'"

"Oh, yes; allus wain' fur suthin' ter turn up. Thar's some powerful fine readin' in that book. Sometimes I git sorter skeer'd an' don't see how things air goin' ter turn out, but airter while they come out all right. When Ned got through with it I told her ter begin at the fust an' read it all over ag'in; and she dun it, sar,—dun it as easy as er greased wag'in goin' down hill. I want her ter keep on er readin' it till I can almost talk it off. Then when she's erway I ken think erbout it an' laugh at ther funny ole feller, an' kick ther step-daddy, an' haul off an' smack his heffer uv a sister that tuck the keys away frum ther boy's mother. An' that other feller that worked fer ther lawyer,—ther feller that grabbed holt uv er hoss an' breathed in his nostrils—"

"*Uriah Heep*," said Len.

"Yes, that's ther very feller. Do yer know what I'd like ter do?" I'd like ter take er green hoop-pole, stan' off erbout five feet, an' wrap it eroun' him erbout three times."

"Think it would do him good, eh?" Len laughingly replied.

"Don't know erbout that, but it would do me er powerful chance uv good ter larrup him. Lemme see, thar wuz ernuther feller, what's his name,—*Midlin'*, I b'l'eve."

"*Midling*," Len repeated.

"Yas, ther feller that went out in ther water ter keep er feller frum drownin' an' got drowneded hisse'f."

"Oh, you mean *Ham*,—*Ham Peggotty*."

"Yas, *Ham*, that's er fack. Knowed his name wuz hog-meat uv some sort. Now, *Ham*, he wa'n't no slouch, as yer go erlong."

"No, he was a good and brave fellow."

"Oh, he wuz er spunky feller as ever lived. Whut 'pears ter be the matter with yer, Mr. Gansett? Look like yer air sorter sad erbout suthin'. Ef thar's anythin' ther matter, out with it."

Ned looked searchingly at Len. "Is it something about me?" she asked.

"Yes," Len replied, "it is something about you."

He then related a part of the conversation which he had held with Honeycut, taking care, however, to make no allusion to Haney. The old man's face grew dark. "Ned," said he, slowly turning to his daughter, "wush yer would go out erwhile till me an' Mr. Gansett talk this here matter over."

Ned obeyed without replying. When she reached the door she turned and cast an imploring glance at Len.

"I don't know what ter do," said old man Hobdy, when Ned had gone. "How come him ter change his notion? T'other week he talked like he wuz might'ly pleased."

"It is useless to attempt to keep up with his whims," Len replied. "The best plan, in fact, is to pay no attention to him."

"Wush ter God I could pay no ertention ter him, but what am I ter do? Yer see he's got me on his hip, an' ken fling me any way he wants ter."

"I do not believe that it is so bad as you think. A threat is quite enough to settle the coward. Tell him

plainly that if he interferes with your affairs that you will kill him."

"Oh, no, no, I can't do that, fur he knows that I wouldn't kill him. Ain't that him er comin' yander? Yas, it is. Hush, Mr. Gansett! Don't let him know whut we wuz talkin' erbout."

Honeycut entered without ceremony, sat down, stretched out his legs and struck the heels of his boots together, scattering mud over the hearthstone.

"How's yer rheumatiz, ole man?" Honeycut asked.

"Ain't felt it fur some time," Hobdy replied; "but I don't know how soon it mout hop erstraddle uv me."

"No, I reckon not, but yer air well ernuff ter go ter er weddin', ain't yer?"

"Who is going to be married?" Len asked, giving Honeycut a look not bespeaking gentleness.

"I am—me an' Ned."

"When do you think the ceremony will take place?" Len asked.

"Thought it mout take place ter-mor'."

"So soon?" Len inquired, with mock interest.

"Yas, never like ter put nothin' off too long. Ef yer air in ther neighborhood yer better come roun'."

"I think that I will be present when Miss Hobdy is married, but I don't think she will be married very soon."

"Yer 'pear ter know suthin' erbout it."

"Oh, yes, I generally keep well informed with regard to the actions of people in whom I take an interest."

"Putty smart feller, ain't yer?"

"Well, I hope that I am not a fool, and I'm pretty certain that I am not a coward."

"That mout be," Honeycut replied, nodding his head toward Hobdy, "but I know er ole feller what ain't so brave."

"Gentlemen," said Hobdy, "please don't talk p'inted. I'm gittin' ole, an' don't know when ther rheumatiz mout hop straddle uv me, so don't talk p'inted."

"Never yer mine," replied Honeycut, "me an' him air talkin' now. Me an' yerse'f will talk when he goes home."

"I have said nothing of going home," Len rejoined.

"No, but if yer don't want ter hear me an' ther ole man talkin' erbout ther weddin' yer better go. Hobdy, I wanter take Ned outer ther printin'-office right erway. What do yer say?"

"W'y, Mr. Honeycut, yer know—"

"Never mind," Len broke in; "don't pay any attention to this fellow. The girl shall not be taken from the office, from an employment in which she takes so much interest,—an employment which has opened up a new life to her."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Gansett," said old Hobdy; "but I reckon she's dun larn't ernuff. She—w'y, here's Braley! Come in, Mr. Braley; wuz jes' talkin' erbout yer. Set down."

Braley shook hands all around. He had just returned, he said, from an expedition which he hoped would be rewarded with a middling of meat, but which had been a failure.

"Dropped in, as I come erlong, to see Mort Haney."

Honeycut looked up. Len, in tones of anxiety which he could not conceal, asked:—

“How is Haney? Does the doctor think that there is any hope of his recovery?”

“Wall, he aughter. Mort is pickin’ up right erlong. Wuz eaten er ash-cake while I was thar. He got better all on er sudden. Oh, he’s all right, an’ will be out in ’er day ur two.”

Honeycut got up, and, addressing Hobdy, said:—

“I wuz jes’ er-jokin’ erbout advisin’ yer ter take yer daughter outen ther printin’-office. I reckon it’s ther best place fur her. Wall, folks, I mus’ be er-shovin’. Good-evenin’.”

XXI.

SUGGESTIONS of spring were breathed in the air, the cold wind of winter was softened into the budding season's gentle sigh. The legislature had adjourned. Dockery, with his characteristic love for the discharge of duty, had voted for an extension of the time. The session had been extended, and during a few more days the ex-editor had enjoyed the distinction of law-making; but now the distinction was gone, and he had returned home to receive the praise and the censure of his constituents.

"Gansett," said Dockery, meeting Len shortly after the praise, but particularly the censure, had begun to sound in his ears, "don't you think that I discharged my duty? Sit down here on this log"—they had met in the woods—"and tell me like a man. I know you can talk like a man when you want to. Damn it!"—lowering his voice,—“my sensible constituents are pleased, but my weak ones have the temerity, or lack of sense, rather, to insinuate that I was not only derelict, but that—well, in short, they impugn my motives. They have talked in this way until I am sick; so now, my brave boy, I want you to say something to lift me up—point out in your own masterly way the good features of my stewardship. Just give it to them from the shoulder. In short they've got a horse on me, and I want you to take up the thing and give them one dash out of the box. What do you say?"

"I don't think that there's any use in saying anything," Len replied. "There is no campaign going on. Let the matter rest."

"Let hell rest!"

"Well, yes, let hell rest, for I should think that it needs one."

"That's good enough for a side remark; but now, really, let us get down to business. I want you, as a favor to me,—you know that I elevated you to the high position which you now occupy in the great fraternity of journalism,—yes, as a favor to me, to *me*, you understand, I want you to give me a few lines—wait a minute. Here is something I've scratched off. I'll read it." He then read the following:—

"There is no position more trying than that of a legislator. It is impossible to please everybody, and sensible men understand this, but there are a few cranks who do not. The best people of this county know that the Hon. Mangus Dockery has discharged his duty; that he was the leading member of the house and chairman of one of the important committees; that his speeches were the best of the session; that he warmly supported the bill reducing the ruinous salaries of State officers, but there are a few envious sore-heads who are growling at the Hon. Mr. Dockery. Chief among these is old Mat Mason. Everybody knows that Mat is a fool, and that, for some of his little practices, he narrowly escaped the penitentiary several years ago. He is a disgrace to this community. We have taken much interest, have studied with pleasure and profit the high political course taken

by the Hon. Mr. Dockery, and we believe that he is good congressional timber."

"How does that strike you?" Dockery asked, carefully folding the paper and placing it on Len's knee. "Does she go?"

"I'll print it on one condition."

"Name an honorable condition, and I will accept it, Gansett. What is the condition?"

"That you sign your name to it."

"My stars alive! man—that would never do."

"Why?"

"Why?" Damn it, don't you know why? Old Mat came in one of going to the penitentiary for killing a man. If I were to sign it he'd shoot me."

"Yes, and don't you suppose that if I were to print it as an editorial he would shoot me?"

"Not the least danger in the world."

"Then why would he shoot you?"

"Because he don't like me, and has had it in for me for some time."

The paper fell to the ground. A breeze caught it up and bore it several yards away. Dockery arose to go after it, but, after advancing a few steps, turned, and said:—

"Gansett, I did not think that you were afraid of anybody. I had always thought that you were a fighter."

"I hope," Len replied, "that you never thought I was a fool."

"Oh, now, here, what's the use in trying to turn it off that way? Print the thing, and I will make it all

right with you. An act of simple justice was never lost on me, Gansett."

Then they engaged in a heated discussion more characterized by force than by elegance of expression. They did not observe the approach of an old fellow with long hair and frowsy eye-brows. The old fellow was Mat Mason. He was walking with his head inclined forward, and with his eyes cast downward. Another breeze had blown the paper still farther away. Mason, suddenly coming upon it, took it up and began to spell out its contents. When he had read it he looked about him, and, seeing Len and Dockery, he cautiously approached.

"Now," said Mr. Dockery to Len, "there is no earthly danger in printing it. I don't want him to know that I wrote it, for—"

"The danger has nothing to do with it," Len broke in. "The question of justice is the one to be considered. Mason has never done me any harm."

"Yes, but he has hurt the county and State by his war on me, damn him! I— Why, how are you, Mr. Mason? I—I—am glad to see you."

Len burst out laughing. Dockery said:—

"Gansett and I were just talking about you. I said that you had made war on me, but that you did it not through bad motives, but because you were honestly mistaken in me."

"Yas, glad ter he'r yer say it. By ther way, Mr. Dockery, I'm lookin' fur er man."

"Who's the man? If I can aid you in your search I shall most willingly do so."

"I'm lookin' fur ther feller what writ this here," said

the old man, striking the palm of his left hand with the paper. Dockery turned pale.

"Know anything erbout it?" old Mat asked.

"Let me see it," said Dockery. He took the paper and with trembling hands held it out and pretended to read it. "No, sir," said he, "I don't know who wrote it, but if I find out I'll come and tell you. If he be a friend of mine, and he seems to be, I will reprimand him."

"Yas, I reckon so. Mr. Gansett, do you know who writ this paper?"

"I will shield the fellow," Len had been musing. "He has no courage, and cannot help it." When old Mat asked the question, Len quickly replied, "I wrote it, and while we were discussing its main points a breeze blew it away."

"Yes," said Dockery, "a breeze—in fact, an ill wind which blows no good—blew it away."

"Mr. Gansett, I like er brave man, an' nothin' stirs me more than ter see er man take on himself suthin' what another man is er feered ter acknowledge. I heard whut yer wuz talkin' erbout, an' I know that Dockery writ this stuff. I oughter kick him all through these woods, but as he has sich er noble man interested in his cause I'll satisfy myself by givin' him one only."

He gave Dockery a vigorous kick, and without remaining to exchange another word, sauntered away. Dockery looked after him, and when he was beyond ear-shot, said:—

"He thinks he's the smartest man in this community, but he's a damned fool."

"Why didn't you knock him down when he kicked you?" Len smilingly asked.

"Gansett," Dockery impressively replied, "acts' of violence do not enter into my mode of warfare. I make war on corruption in high places. I battle for the lowly and humble, not with a brute force, but with the mightier weapon of the brain. I was astonished at you, Len."

"Why so?"

"Don't you know that when you told Mason that you wrote the thing he disputed your word. Might just as well have called you a liar. You ought to have knocked him down. Oh," the ex-editor continued, when Len burst out laughing, "it's no laughing matter. A man must protect his honor. Well, I must be going. Isn't that Mason coming along yonder? No, it's old Mort Haney. Well, take care of yourself."

The "Picket" was now quite a newspaper. Old Bob Gansett declared that it was the best sheet ever printed, and his wife asseverated that if her dear grandson would only print more religious and less news matter the paper would be a great blessing to the community. The old couple were proud of Len. Mrs. Gansett was particularly so after hearing Brother Murray say that the editor was a man of good sense, and that he would have made an excellent circuit rider.

"Ned grows better-looking all the time," old Bob one evening remarked to Len. "Never saw such a change in a gal, never in my born days. Smart, too, eh?"

"One of the most intelligent creatures I have ever seen. She makes me ashamed of myself."

"Sets type right pert, I reckon."

"Yes, and not only that, she has become quite a grammarian. She reads the best books, and instead of being a simpering girl, such as the schools turn out, she is thoughtful and deep. Instead of being the girl who writes, 'Classmates' we have met to part, to go out into the busy world,' and so on, she can write up an event in a correct and concise way. She is a wonderful girl."

"Have you said anything to her lately about marryin'?"

"I hinted at something of the kind yesterday, but she reminded me of a promise I was compelled to make her when she first went into the office."

"Has Honeycut said anything more?"

"No, he keeps out of the way. I think that Colonel Bently said something to him."

"Did you speak to the colonel about it?"

"No, but I am inclined to think that Ned did."

"Bently is the only man that can do anything with Honeycut."

"Yes, for the reason that he almost supports the fellow. Bently does not like him, but cannot resist his entreaties."

"Is old Hobdy satisfied?"

"Thoroughly. He has become passionately fond of novels, and declares that he has entered upon the happiest time of his life."

"Len," said Mrs. Gansett, entering the room, "I've got some good news for you."

"What is it, grandma?"

"W'y, Brother Murray tells me that he will write out his sermons an' let you print 'em."

Len's countenance fell. The old man roared with laughter.

"Now, Bob, you neenter laugh, for it is a fact. He told me so yistidy."

"Oh, I don't doubt he told you."

"Then whut air you laughin' at?"

"Laughin' at Len."

"Whut air you laughin' at him fur? He did tell me so."

"Oh, I don't doubt that."

"Whut, then air you laughin' at? Say."

"Ask Len."

"Whut is he laughin' at, Len?"

"Oh, I suppose he thinks that I don't care to print the sermons."

"But you do, don't you?"

"Well, I can't say that I hanker after the distinction."

The old lady uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and with an air of bewilderment regarded her grandson.

"I don't question their merit, grandma," said Len, "but I cannot afford to fill up my paper with them."

The old lady sighed and turned away. Old man Gansett sprang from his seat, hastened to the door, and looked out.

"What on earth is the matter, Bob?" the old lady asked.

The old man, turning from the door, said, "No, he hasn't done it yit."

"Who hasn't done whut? Tell me."

"Why, Brother Murray hasn't set the river afire yit."

"You good-for-nothing!" the old lady rejoined, smil-

ing in spite of herself. "You need a beatin', if anybody in this world ever did. It 'pears like the older you git the wus you air. Never mind, you'll think o' all this when I'm dead an' gone. You'll think o' how you have mighty nigh harassed the life outen me. Never mind, sir. It'll all come back to you when it's too late."

One day Bently came to the office and told Len that he had urgent business with him. An addition to the office had been built, and Len now enjoyed the luxury of a room from intrusion. When the colonel had been conducted to the room, Len, after closing the door, said:—

"Now I am at your service."

"Are you very busy?"

"No, not very."

"Let us sit a while and talk." He passed his hand over his forehead, as if he would wipe away a troubled thought, and said:—

"We are friends, I hope, Gansett."

"Most assuredly."

A few minutes of silence followed. The colonel looked at Len as though he were trying to read the young man's soul. The situation became embarrassing. "Did you ever read 'Michiavel'?" the colonel asked.

"No, sir, I do not like him."

"Ah!"

Another silence followed. The colonel arose and thoughtfully walked the floor. He paused, put his hand on the young man's arm and looked into his eyes.

"Do you know, Gansett, that I doubt man in general."

"We all do, sometimes."

"Very true."

He resumed his walk, continued it for a few moments, and then, with a sudden change of manner, said:—

"Well, I'll come over some other time and see you; or, perhaps, it would be better for you to come over and see me."

"All right; but say, colonel, are you in need of money? If so, I can, perhaps, make the last payment on the office before it is due."

"Rest perfectly easy on that point, my dear boy; rest perfectly easy. I told you that you need never pay me,—for, indeed, you have greatly benefited the community,—and I would not have accepted payment at all had you not forced it upon me."

"I know that, colonel."

"Well, then, be assured that I am not needing money. The matter of which I wish to speak does not refer to money. Gansett, I have taken a deep interest in you, and I do not see why you should not become a great man; but," turning toward the door, "I must go. Come over Saturday night and stay all night with me." He stopped when he entered the composing-room. "Hard at work, I see."

"Yes, rather," replied Collins. "Got a delinquent tax-list on hand and it keeps us moving. Used up nearly all the sorts in the office."

"Dry work, I dare say."

"Dry to the reader," Collins replied, "but pretty moist to the publisher. Miss Hobdy delights in it."

"No, I don't," Ned replied, getting off a stool and emptying a "stick" of type. "I'd rather set up an obit-

uary any time. Section so-and-so, township what not, and range this and that. It's just as stupid as it can be."

"We'll have to be like a fellow I knew in Texas," Collins replied. "The boys rode him on a rail till he got so used to it he wouldn't travel any other way. Hired two Mexicans to carry him around on a rail. His wife, with an eye to his comfort, padded the rail, but he couldn't ride it until he tore off the pad. Said that he appreciated her kindness, but that he had to consult his own comfort. So now, you see, we don't like tax-lists, but after we get used to them we can't do without them."

"Between the two, a tax-list and a rail,—providing it be fixed up with a side saddle and carried by able-bodied men,—I would choose the rail," Ned replied.

"Gansett," said the colonel when he reached the door, "please do not forget our engagement."

XXII.

SATURDAY evening. A violent storm was blowing, and the rain streaks,—they could scarcely be called drops,—woven into great gray sheets, swept over the fields.

"My gracious alive, Len," exclaimed Mrs. Gansett, "you are not going out in such a storm as this!"

"Yes; I promised Colonel Bently that I would come over and stay all night with him."

"Done what?" asked old man Gansett, looking up from an old leather-covered book.

"Promised Colonel Bently that I would come over to his house this evening and remain all night with him."

"But you ain't goin' to do it, air you?"

"Yes."

"Sich a time as this!" exclaimed the old man, throwing down his book and staring at Len. "W'y, he'll think you're outen your senses if you go at sich a time as this. Set down, an' we'll have a snack to eat pretty soon."

"No, my mind is made up."

"Well," replied the old man, taking up his book, "if your mind is made up I've got no more to say."

"Now, Bob," interposed Mrs. Gansett, "that's allus the way. You air allus ready to give in without argyment that mout result in good. Len you'd be drowned in the rain, my child; an', besides that, the horse would almost be blinded an' mout run away with you."

"I am going to walk."

"Let him alone," said the old man.

"There you go agin—"

"Let him alone."

"I do wish 't you'd hush. A body never can say nothin' without you have—"

"Let him alone."

The old lady flounced into a rocking-chair. Len passed out into the storm.

"Why, Gansett," exclaimed Colonel Bently, as he conducted the young man into the library, "is it possible that you have come at such a time? Come, you must change your clothes immediately. I'll get you the best in the house."

"I brought extra clothes in a water-proof bag, which I left in the hall."

"Well, you are indeed a man of provision. Put on your dry clothes. Go into the room just across the hall."

"Now, I suppose you are ready for supper," said the colonel, when Len, having put on dry clothing, returned to the library.

"I am not hungry; still, I am always ready to eat at your table."

"Thank you. By the way, I have some excellent brandy. Better try some."

"No, I can get along better without it."

"I can't agree with you, Gansett; however, we'll not argue the point."

The colonel seemed to be in the best of spirits, and during supper entertained Len with anecdotes and hum-

erous bits of his experience. After supper, when they returned to the library, Len waited, not without a feeling of impatience, in the hope that the colonel would introduce the important business at which he had so vaguely hinted a few days before, but one anecdote continued to follow another until the clock struck eleven. Gradually the colonel grew more serious. He drew Len out on many subjects.

"The philosophy of circumstances shapes every life," said the colonel.

"But it should not be so," Len rejoined. "Every life should shape circumstances."

"That, my dear boy, would bring about an endless conflict, in that different lives would try to give different shapes to circumstances. I do not believe that a man can shape his destiny, but thus much I do believe. I believe that we often miss an end simply because we are unable to discover it and because we have no one to point it out. We all have a certain aim, a certain idealistic end to accomplish. In youth the bright mark is almost within reach, but as we grow older, the mark, less bright, recedes. Those who fancy that they have reached the mark find after a while that it is a delusion. There is no fame but that is followed by disgust; no exhilaration that is not followed by weariness; no laughter that does not at last end in a sigh. But there is a great lesson to be learned from all this."

"That no one should strive to cultivate the tree of ambition?" Len asked.

"Oh, no; but that no one should become intoxicated with the wine of ambition; that we should endeavor to

make ourselves comfortable; in other words, that we should first accumulate money, with which there is no great misfortune,—except the death of friends,—and without which there is no great success.”

“I am not over-ambitious,” Len rejoined. “I hope to be comfortable without having to enter the lists and swing a battle-ax for money. I look forward to a modest home, a happy wife, a mind-feeding library.”

“A commendable aim, surely; but you may strive for years and years before you can sit down in such a home. You may be old and have rheumatism. Your eyes may not be able to lift food to the mind.”

“Yes, but what am I to do? How can I get this home except in the tread-mill way? In fact, I prefer to get it that way. I abhor financial speculation. I do not like trade. I claim no superiority over those who buy and sell, but I confess that such trade is distasteful to me; in fact, I am not equal to the demand of trade.”

“Well, well,” said the colonel, after a moment’s reflection, “we all have our views. I like to hear you express yourself, and I think that after a while we’ll understand each other. My object in thus drawing you out is to impress upon your mind a part of my own philosophy. A philosophy, unless it is imparted to some one, is crippled. What I mean is, that to enjoy a principle we must share it with a friend. I have never, as you have doubtless observed, attempted to conceal the esteem in which I hold you.” The young man, who had arisen and who was standing with his hands resting on the back of a chair, bowed in acknowledgment, and the colonel continued: “You are well balanced, Gan-

sett, and I hope that you will never allow any tide to take you off your feet."

"I don't think that I ever have, colonel."

"No, not exactly; but I could not help but notice that you were almost unhealthy elated over the reproduction of your sketches. Now, hold on. I know that you feel a just pride in your work, and, moreover, are grateful to see that large journals copy it, but do not let that pride redound to your disadvantage."

"What must I do,—stop writing sketches and confine myself to mere local mention?"

"Oh, no, no! You misunderstand me. I simply do not wish you to centre all your aims, all your hopes, in such work. There is something better awaiting you."

"What is that something?" Len asked.

The colonel arose, took a turn about the room, approached Len, looked into his eyes, and said:—

"There awaits for you, my boy, the means with which to purchase true greatness,—contentment. Do not attempt to hurl yourself into literary work now. The lines of art and the lines of bread are rarely found on the same page. You should not be compelled to write for money, but, having money, should write to make your readers better. There are some instances of good 'bread' writing, but they are few. Be an artist, not a laborer."

"Colonel, I am not trying to hurl myself into literature. To tell you the truth, I do not look beyond my own little journal."

"Well, I hope we have both been instructed by our conversation. I told you the other day that I had im-

portant business with you, but in reality I had not. I merely wanted to talk to you. There are times when I am compelled to express myself, but even then I choose my auditor. Suppose we go to bed."

XXIII.

ANOTHER summer came and passed, another spring breathed with redolent breath. The Hon. Mangus Dockery, having lost political caste, and having failed as a bookkeeper for a plantation supply-house, began the publication of another paper,—the “Eagle of Freedom.” He established his office in a weather-boarded shed, with a “dirt floor.” A number of people who knew the pinched condition of Dockery’s finances were surprised when the prospectus of his new paper appeared; but they need not have been, for Dockery, when he had not money enough to do anything else, always started a paper.

“Len,” said Dockery, “our interests will not conflict, for Dogwood is now large enough to support two papers.” There had been three houses built in Dogwood since Dockery edited the “Picket.” “Yes,” continued the ex-statesman, “there’s room enough—”

“At the top,” Len smilingly suggested.

“Yes, Gansett, at the top, an eminence which we will both occupy in peace and harmony. We can help each other mentally and physically. We must run fearless papers, Gansett. The ginger-cake and cider business won’t pay. Then let us speak out. Ah, my dear boy, somebody will find his jacket warmed before long.”

“Are you going to warm old man Mason’s jacket?” Len asked.

“Gansett, that man is beneath my notice. You

remember once how I restrained myself when he insulted you."

"The time he kicked you, eh?" Len suggested.

"Let me see, I believe he did say something about kicking me; but, be that as it may, he is beneath my notice. My first number is not as well printed as I could wish, but I've got the circulation. I had my choice,—go to Congress or run a newspaper. Then came a struggle. I knew that I could accomplish much by going to Congress, and I carefully considered the subject; but then my love for printer's ink came up within my breast, and—well, I had to start a paper."

One evening, while Ned Hobdy was pursuing her way homeward, Dockery overtook her.

"Why, good-evening, Miss Hobdy! You seem to be in a hurry."

"No, I am not in very much of a hurry, that is, no more than usual. My father is always so anxious to see me that I am always anxious to get home."

"Quite commendable, I assure you; quite commendable. How is the old gentleman's health?"

"Not very good."

"Sorry to hear it. By the way, they tell me that you have become quite a scholar."

"They have overrated me," she replied.

"Oh, no; they simply do you justice. Are you fond of the business?"

"Yes."

"Quite commendable, I assure you. Don't walk quite so fast. I have a proposition to make."

She looked at him quickly, but did not slacken her pace.

"You have learned about all you can in the 'Picket' office," said Dockery.

"We never learn all we can, no matter where we are located," she replied.

"Ah, some truth in that, but it is not the whole truth. Our surroundings have much to do with our ability to learn. If we associate with scholars our minds are more apt to bear scholarly fruit. Does Gansett pay you well?"

"Better than I deserve."

"Oh, no, no, no; quite impossible; but, be that as it may, there is something else to take into consideration. You are now on the road to accomplishment, and I think that I can finish the work which Gansett has begun. In short, Miss Hobdy, I offer you a situation in my office."

Ned almost screamed with laughter.

"Oh, I'm in earnest, Miss Hobdy."

"I have no desire to leave the 'Picket' office, Mr. Dockery."

"Not for greater advantages?"

Again the girl laughed. "What advantages can you offer?" she asked. "You work in mud when the weather is wet, and in dust when it is dry. You hint, and rather broadly, too, at your superior education. There is no more comparison between you and Mr. Gansett than there is between a star and a lightning-bug. He is cultivated and original; you are superficial and a plagiarist; and, sir, I don't thank you—"

"Oh, now, here, Miss Hobdy, I fear that Gansett has prejudiced you against me."

"What cause could he have? I assure you that he does not discuss you, at least in my presence."

"Ah, a silence begotten of envy," Dockery replied.

"Envy!" the girl contemptuously repeated. "We never envy those who are below us. Good-evening."

"Wait one moment. I would not only offer you a place in my office; I—listen, please—I would give you a home. I—won't you wait? Well, you are running away from good fortune. But it is always the way with those who are lifted above their rightful station."

Ned stopped. She looked furiously at Dockery and exclaimed:—

"You are an unprincipled coward! I will tell Mr. Gansett what you have said."

"Oh, hold on, Miss Hobdy! Please wait a minute. It was only a joke, I assure you. Now you are gone without waiting to hear an explanation. Never saw such a neighborhood. Nobody can take a joke."

His knees smote together. He hurried homeward. He saw Len coming, but he turned into the woods to avoid him.

That night Len went over to Hobdy's house. The old man, whose mind was full of the "Vicar of Wakefield," was delighted to see him.

"That ole preacher is the cap'n," said Hobdy. "He tickled me mighty nigh to death when he made them women folks go back inter ther house an' snatch off all that finery. Let's see, what's ther name uv ther man that writ it?"

"Goldsmith," Len replied.

"Yes, Goldsmith; but he hit as hard as a blacksmith. Ned, yer mus' read that book over ter me ernuther time. I ain't quite got ther hang uv all ther p'int. Mr. Gansett, I've been ernuther man sense Ned got so she ken read like er preacher. I uster look at books and wonder how folks could hump over 'em all day—didn't know ther wuz so much fun in 'em." The old fellow laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks. Then he swallowed some tobacco, and coughed until he was almost strangled.

"I had company part of the way home," Ned remarked, turning to Len.

"Indeed; but that is not strange. Who was the fortunate person?"

"Our distinguished rival, Dockery."

"I thought that I saw him in the road some distance ahead of me, as I came home, but upon looking up the second time I saw that he had disappeared."

"His conscience must have driven him into the woods."

"How so?" Len quickly asked.

Ned, after making Len promise not to get into trouble, related the conversation she had held with Dockery. The old man looked up and frowned. Len quietly remarked, "To-morrow I will tell him he must be more careful in the future."

The next day, shortly after Ned arrived at the office, Len went out. Ned looked inquiringly at him as he passed her. She then went to the door and said:—

"Remember your promise."

"I will," he replied.

He went to Dockery's office. The ex-legislator was standing in front of a small looking-glass, tacked against the wall, combing his hair.

"Why, how are you, my dear boy? Sit down. Say, the last issue of the 'Picket' was as fine a paper as I ever saw. Did Miss Hobdy tell you of the little joke I tried to play on her? Fearful that she might forget it, I thought that I would hurry to your office; but, by George! I forgot it myself."

"Ah, you had doubtless started to my office when you turned into the woods, yesterday evening, to shorten the distance."

"I—I—did I turn into the woods?"

"Yes, I think so. Miss Hobdy has told me what you said to her,—told me how you cast a slur upon her former condition."

"It was all a joke."

"A gentlemanly one, I must say. Put on your coat."

"What are you going to do?" Dockery falteringly asked.

"Don't ask another question. Put on your coat and come with me."

Dockery tremblingly obeyed. Just before they reached the "Picket" office, Dockery said: "Preacher Murray has just gone into your office. He—"

"Silence!"

When they entered the office, Len, after bowing to the preacher, turned to Dockery and said:—

"Get down on your knees, there, near Miss Hobdy's stool."

"Oh, dear Gan—"

"Get down!"

Dockery obeyed. "Miss Hobdy," said Len, "don't look at him."

Ned turned her face away.

"Now," said Len, touching Dockery with the toe of his boot, "apologize. Tell Miss Hobdy that you are a brute, a liar, a plagiarist, and, withal, a coward. Tell her that you haven't manliness enough to appreciate a lady."

"Mr. Gansett—"

Len kicked him. "Tell her."

"Miss Hobdy, I am a—a—liar—"

"And a plagiarist; go on—"

"A plagiarist and—"

"Coward," said Len.

"Coward," repeated Dockery.

"Come, hurry up! Tell her that you haven't manliness enough to appreciate a lady."

"Haven't manliness enough to appreciate a lady. Now let me say something—"

"Not another word. Get out of this house."

XXIV.

ABOUT an hour after Dockery left the "Picket" office Len received from him the following note:—

MR. GANSETT—In the language of the ethereal bard, "In peace there's nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility." I have often pondered over this grand thought, and I am sure that it has kept me out of many difficulties. It was this thought, my dear Gansett, that enabled me to curb my wrath a few minutes ago. Had it not been for this thought I would have come upon you like an enraged tiger. To you I will now confess that I was wrong in speaking to Miss Hobdy as I did; but, my dear sir, wounded love weighs not its words. I trust that you will pardon me, but I had hoped that Miss Hobdy would one day be mine; but now, sir, I magnanimously relinquish all claims in your favor. I do not stop to ask myself whether or not you would do as much for me, but I make this sacrifice in obedience to the promptings of an unselfish nature. I will endeavor to bear my loss as becomes an American citizen, a man in whom a flourishing community has placed its trust. That I shall pass through dark hallways, and sit down in gloomy chambers there can be no question, but with the flat-iron of determination I will smooth the wrinkles from my brow. I hope, sir, that you will not consider our affair of enough importance to warrant a place in your columns. Believe me, sir, your obedient servant,

HON. MANGUS DOCKERY.

"Ned," said Len, "read this. Read it and reflect upon the sublimity of human sacrifice,"

Ned read the note, threw it down, and without saying a word took up her "stick" and resumed her work.

"Well, what do you think?"

"What can I think?"

"You can think that the Hon. Mangus Dockery is a noble man or—"

"A fool," the girl suggested.

"Have you no balm for his wounded soul?"

"No balm."

"Shall I answer his note?"

"Do as you like."

"In case I answer it," continued the editor, slyly winking at Collins, "what must I say with regard to you?"

"Nothing."

"Have you no word for him?"

"No."

"Come, be generous."

"Well, shall I write a note to enclose with yours?"

"Yes," Len replied, again winking at Collins.

"All right," said the girl, getting off her stool and seating herself at a desk. After a short season of writing she said:—

"You may send him this."

The girl looked mischievously at Collins and smiled. Len took the sheet of paper and read as follows:—

"MY DEAR MR. DOCKERY—Your declaration of love is indeed a revelation to me. I have always admired you,—yes, have more than admired you,—and I hope that at an early day you will come and see me."

"The deuce!" Len exclaimed. "You are not going to send this."

Collins roared. "She got you that time, cap'n," said

he. "Well, we've had enough foolishness. If we want to get this paper up we've got to pull out."

That evening, as Len and Ned were walking along the road, swinging a basket between them, the young man said:—

"Ned, have I not kept my promise,—the promise that I would not talk of love?"

"Yes; but you are about to break it now."

"What makes you think so?"

"Your sly introduction of the subject."

"Well, suppose I break it?"

"You will weaken my confidence in you."

"I don't want to do that, I am sure."

"Then don't talk of love."

"Why? Is the subject distasteful to you?"

"No."

"Then why do you object to my speaking of it?"

"Oh, I told you why. You know that I love you—worship you. Now let it rest. Give me my basket, I must turn off here."

"Just wait a moment. Ned, you have never cared anything for Dockery, have you?"

"How foolish you are!"

"But tell me. Understand that ardent love is jealous of a shadow."

"You know that I don't like that vain, shallow man. Go on home, Len; you are unnatural this evening."

"Well, sweet girl, good-evening."

When Len reached home he found Colonel Bently and Bob Gansett sitting in the yard. The evening was delightful. Bull-bats winged their whirling flight, and

the whippoorwills, emerging from their daytime seclusion, had begun to sound the notes of their monotonous song. The chatter-jack sang in the oak-tree, and the droning black bug, with clumsy bump, struck the clothes-line. A soft, mellow light and a growing shadow waltzed over the fields, and down the lane the bell-cow came, while the capering calf pressed his head against the bars to catch the appetizing fragrance of his mother's breath.

"My dear boy," said the colonel, arising and extending his hand, "I am delighted to see you. Have this seat."

"Oh, no," said Len; "keep your seat. I'll get another chair."

"Yes," remarked old Bob, "for it would be a putty come-off for you to come all the way over here to give up your cheer to a youngster."

"Ah," laughed the colonel; "and such a youngster, too!"

Len brought a chair from the hallway and sat down. The colonel turned to him and said:—

"Len, your paper improves with each succeeding issue."

"A compliment, surely, colonel. To hear you say it does me more good than to know that such is the case, since I know that your compliment comes from the kind feeling which you bear me."

"Ah, my dear boy, you can indeed take a truth and make it a compliment to him who utters it."

"To utter truth, colonel, is compliment enough of itself."

"Yes," said old man Gansett, "as truth has become so sca'ce."

"I don't know, grandpa, but that the supply is equal to the demand."

"Journalism induces pleasant satire," said the colonel.

"Or rather an utterance of the actual," Len replied.

"It seems that all our arrows are barbed this evening," said the colonel. "I have always known that Len was incisive, but I have never before known him to make such free use of his blade."

"My blade is dull, colonel, except when your presence sharpens it."

"Ah," said the colonel, "we are resolved into a mutual admiration society."

Mrs. Gansett appeared in the doorway. "Before you can sharpen any blade," she said, "you'll have to calk up the trough of the grindstone. The sun has dried up the water and cracked it."

"I reckon we'll get along all right," said the old man, laughing.

"Now, what's the matter with you, Bob?" the old lady demanded. "A body can't say a word without you have to snicker. You act like you was possessed. Make me think you have gone daft. Well, come on, now, supper is ready. We haven't got anything very enticin', but you're welcome to what we've got. Come, colonel!"

"Madam," replied the colonel, arising and bowing with a mien which diplomatists might envy, "I ate dinner just before leaving home, and am not hungry, yet your invitation almost gives me an appetite."

"Much obleeged," the old lady replied, with a slight

inclination of her venerable head. "Len you an' gran'-pa fetch yo' cheers."

After supper the colonel approached Len, drew him to one side, and said:—

"My dear boy, if you have nothing of importance on hand to-night I wish you would go over and stay all night with me."

"Colonel, I am afriad that I cannot go to-night."

"Why? Anything important?"

"Well, it might not be important in the estimation of any one else."

"Come, tell me what it is."

"Well, for some time I have been working on a story in which I have become so much interested that I am now anxious to finish it."

"A high flown composition, I dare say."

"No, sir; on the contrary, it is humble in conception and lowly in treatment."

"The scene, then, I suppose, is laid in a charity hospital," the colonel smilingly remarked.

"No; it is laid in this neighborhood."

"Ah, that is a stroke of genius."

"Why so?"

"Because the man of genius always writes near home. The foolish and aimless romances seeks a country of which his probable readers are not familiar. Then he can exercise a fancy acquired from unhealthful books instead of throwing aside the unlikely, and writing of the true. But, say, the story won't suffer if you go and stay with me to-night."

"That may be, but I am afraid that you would if I go."

"I'll risk that. I must tell you something. You know that I am not inclined to be suspicious."

"Yes."

"Well, but I have begun to suspect some one of an intention to rob me."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. I don't know exactly why, but I believe that Honeycut has designs upon my house."

"I don't know," Len replied, "but that he has designs upon every house where he thinks a strict watch is not kept."

"I hope that you will say nothing about my suspicions, for they may prove to be ill-founded."

"How long have you suspected Honeycut?"

"I have never placed much confidence in him, but I did not actually suspect him until recently."

"Why did you have anything to do with him in the first place?" Len asked.

"He came to my house one morning and asked if I had any work he might do. He declared that he was in great need of a few dollars, and that he would perform any kind of work. I did not like his looks, but I took pity on him. He did his work well. His ignorance of social customs led me to believe that his growing familiarity was not intentional, otherwise I would have forbidden his coming to my house again."

"Why do you suspect him of an intention to rob you?"

"Well, he came over to my house this morning, and with that freedom which every one exercises on my

premises he wandered about unattended. I was sitting in the library, reading, when I remembered that I had left my favorite pipe in another room. I went to get it. My slippered feet made no noise. Upon shoving open the door, which was ajar, I saw Honeycut attempting to unscrew the fastenings of the window-shutters. I addressed him, and, much confused, he stammered out an incoherent reply. He concealed his screw-driver under his coat, and, after making a few commonplace remarks, withdrew, apparently satisfied that I had not discovered his design. I am not afraid, Len, but I'd like to have you stay with me to-night."

"If it be an actual accommodation I'll go with you."

"Thank you, my dear boy."

When they reached Bently's house the colonel conducted Len to a room, pointed to the window, and said:—

"There is his work."

"Yes, the catches are removed."

"Now, my dear Len, if nothing comes of this, promise me that you will not mention the affair."

"Of course, colonel."

"You promise, then?"

"Yes, but I don't see why you should desire to shield a bad man."

"It is not my desire to shield him, Len."

"Then why not have him arrested?"

"That would be useless. I have not sufficient evidence to convict him; besides, I can only suspect him of a design, and not of his having committed a crime. If

you should speak of it now, he would be put upon his guard. I want to catch him, don't you see?"

"You are right, colonel."

The colonel and Len talked until a late hour. When the young man went to the room which had been assigned to him, he extinguished the light, opened the window, and sat down. The night was beautiful. The sheep, lying on the green pasture, looked like white pillows scattered over a dark bed.

"There is no use in my remaining in this room," the young man mused. "I can't sleep. Believe I'll go down and sit under the trees. No, I'd better not disturb every one by walking through the house. Let me see, I can get out on the roof of the gallery and slide down a post."

A few moments later Len was on the ground. "Now, how am I going to get back?" he asked himself. "Well, I'll have to arouse the colonel, after all."

He walked a short distance from the house and sat down under a tree. An ill-boding tree-toad dismally croaked above him. A night-hawk cried. A negro on a distant plantation blew his melancholy quills. Some one climbed over the fence. Len's heart beat faster. The figure slowly and cautiously approached the tree under which the young man was sitting. Len recognized Honeycut. Honeycut perceived Len and stopped.

"That you. co'n'l?"

"No," Len replied.

"Oh, it's Gansett."

"Yes, it is Gansett. What are you doing here this time of night?"

"What're you doin' here?"

"I don't know that it concerns you."

"Wall, I don't know that my bein' here consarns you, nuther."

"I am inclined to think differently. I am Colonel Bently's guest, and—"

"That's all right," said Honeycut, sitting down on the grass. "Putty night, ain't it?"

"Most too light for your business, I should think."

"Mebbe so, but it'll be darker when the moon goes down."

"What you lack in courage you make up in insolence."

"That's it, I reckon. Ef yer lose on yer co'n yer've got ter make up on yer hogs."

"Yes, but I know of one hog on which but little can be made up."

A window was thrown up. A voice demanded: "Who is that down there?"

"Me an' Gansett," Honeycut replied.

The colonel came down, and, addressing Honeycut, asked:—

"What are you doing here this time of night?"

"I was passin' an' wanted a drink uv water, an' come in to go to ther well."

"Get your water, then, and go on."

"Yes, sah," said Honeycut, arising. "I am much obleeged ter yer. Good-night, gentlemen."

XXV.

THE young men of Dogwood were much excited over the arrival of a young woman, Miss Pauline Chackerin, a graduate of a well-known college. She came to teach school, not because she needed the money,—for her parents, of course, were well off,—but because she wanted to be of use in the world. Miss Pauline spoke with a cultivated lisp. She dressed becomingly, and well understood the art of arranging her hair so that her high, narrow forehead might find some relief. The young men who, with high-heeled boots and ruffled shirt-bosoms, visited her, declared her a person of wonderful intelligence; and although the young lady could not help feeling contempt for her surroundings,—always seeming to have trouble with her skirts lest they should touch something—yet she talked freely with the humble villagers, generously showing that she was not averse to assisting in an amelioration of their condition. Miss Pauline soon became acquainted with Len Gansett; indeed she went to the “Picket” office and introduced herself to him. She had done much literary work, had been brought up with a pen in her hand, and could occasionally write short stories for the “Picket.”

She had written for the “Waverly Magazine,” and although the editor did not pay her, yet he gave her great encouragement. She would rather write for home publications, for she wanted to see the immediate impress of her mind upon friends with whom she was daily

associated. She intended to make a special feature of composition, and to aid her classes she would read to them her own writings.

Len published the first story which she submitted. It was a pedantic composition, but was not wholly without merit. Her visits to the office became frequent. She paid but little attention to Ned, and in speaking to her assumed a superiority which Ned, when the authoress was gone, would mimic, to the great delight of old Collins.

One day when Len and Collins were out Miss Pauline called with another story.

"Where is Mr. Gansett?" she asked, seating herself and throwing her parasol upon a table. "Oh, dear," she continued, without giving Ned time to reply, "how this insalubriously warm weather does affect me! Did you say that Mr. Gansett is out?"

"I did not say anything," Ned replied; "but he is out."

"Can you approximate the time of his return, Miss—What is your name, again?"

"I have always had the same name, and consequently have not been named again. Ned Hobdy is my name."

"Ned, did you say?"

"Yes," Ned replied, reaching after a capital letter.

"I don't think it is a pretty name."

"Neither do I."

"Did you tell me when Mr. Gansett would be likely to return?"

"No, for I have no idea."

"How long have you known Mr. Gansett? Since you were a school-girl, I suppose?"

"I am nothing but a school-girl now. This is my school."

Miss Pauline frowned slightly, and replied, "Not a very complete school, I imagine."

"No, it is not perfect in all its branches, yet it makes a special feature of composition. I learn a great deal from the original stories which I set up."

Miss Pauline cast a quick glance at the type-setter, but, detecting on the girl's face no expression of sarcasm, remarked, "Yes; but it is like eating the fruit which some one else has grown."

"But it is not necessary to plant the tree in order to enjoy the fruit."

"Miss Hobdy," said the authoress, "it is a pity that you had not been sent to school and regularly educated. You might have become really bright."

"Thank you; but, as I was not regularly educated, I must now make the best of the irregular means which are within my reach."

"Yes, I opine so. I do wish Mr. Gansett would come. I have another story for him," taking up a small roll of manuscript which she had been affectionately holding on her lap. "Perhaps you would like to read it."

"No, I'll wait until it is put on the hook."

"Oh, no; I want you to read it now. I want to point out the fine points to you."

Ned got off her stool, took the manuscript, spread it upon the table, and, drawing up a chair, sat down. Before beginning to read she said:—

"Excuse me, but you should not roll manuscript.

See, if I were not to roll it first one way and then another I could not keep it on my case."

"That is a question for type-setters to discuss, and not of concern to editors," the teacher replied.

"Upon the contrary," rejoined Ned, "it is quite annoying to editors."

"Well, never mind, read the story."

Ned arranged the manuscript and began reading. Miss Pauline, with an air of superiority, settled herself back, and, with a self-satisfied smile, closely watched the countenance of the reader.

"Look here a moment, said Ned.

"Well," replied Miss Pauline, leaning forward. "Have you found anything wrong?"

"Yes. Listen to this: 'Douglas was very hungry, but he had nothing to eat in his basket.'"

"Well, what's wrong with it?"

"He certainly did not intend to eat anything in his basket. You mean that Douglas had nothing in his basket to eat."

"You are foolish!" exclaimed Miss Pauline. "One expression is just as good as the other."

"Yes," Ned replied, "I think that one is even better than the other. Here's something else. You say that Douglas had no money to spend in his pocket, when you doubtless mean that he had no money in his pocket to spend. You will observe that the most direct statements are the best."

"Who are you, to give such advice!" exclaimed Miss Pauline.

"And, again," continued Ned, paying no attention to

the fury of the authoress, "you do not understand punctuation. If you had put a semi-colon there, and a comma here, you would not have begun three successive short sentences with a conjunction, which, you must admit, does not sound well, as each sentence is declarative and leaves nothing for the following sentence to take up, thereby dispensing with the connecting link of 'and.' I do not profess to be a grammarian, but I am something of a student, and—"

"Student!" Miss Pauline contemptuously repeated. "You don't know what a student is. Give me that story. I would leave it here, but I am afraid that Mr. Gansett would never see it. I know that he will print it, regardless of your criticism. *You* a student!" continued Miss Pauline, punching the table with the end of her parasol; "why, you don't know anything—have never seen anything. *You* presume to criticize *me*! I will tell Mr. Gansett to teach you better manners. I was graduated at Wilson's seminary, I will have you understand,—a place where—"

"Politeness is omitted," Ned suggested.

"No, miss; a place where politeness is taught."

"You probably failed to take the entire course."

"Oh, I could *choke* you!"

"No, I don't think you could. I was graduated in the woods, and my arms are very strong. Have you ever chopped any wood, Miss Chackerin? Excellent exercise!"

"You are a most despicable wretch, and I'll have Mr. Gansett discharge you,—that's what I'll do. Oh, you hateful thing!"

"Don't be excited. Sit down and correct your story."

"I'd like to correct you, you hateful wretch!"

"Look here, your abuse has gone about far enough. You came in here expecting to astonish me with your silly stuff, and when, after you defied my criticism, I criticised your story, you flew into a passion. You attempted to pose here as a superior being, and it seems that your strongest effort has been made to completely overawe and crush me. I have never sought to harm you, have never spoken of you but with respect, while you have taken every possible occasion to speak lightly of me. I think that I know the reason, but you need not put yourself to extraordinary trouble. Mr. Gansett and I are old friends."

"What do you mean?" Miss Pauline almost screamed.

"Oh, if you do not understand, reflect, and doubtless your own mind will suggest a solution."

Miss Pauline gathered up her skirts and rushed from the house. A few minutes afterward, Ned, looking through the window, saw Len and the school-teacher walking slowly down the road. Collins entered the office.

"Well, pulling away, are you, Miss Hobdy? Why, what makes you so nervous?"

"Yes, I am pulling away; but I don't know that I am nervous."

"Saw the teacher just now," said Collins, as he took up his composing-stick, "and I was afraid that she had come around to leave us some more slush. Did she?"

"She brought a story, but took it away with her again."

"How so?"

"Because I criticised it, and she got mad and took it away."

"Good!" exclaimed Collins, tapping the bar of his "case" with an "em quad."

"She considered it very impudent of me, declaring that she was a graduate, and that I had never seen anything."

"What did you tell her?"

"Oh, I don't know what all, but I think that she left with a pretty good idea of my opinion of her. Oh, if I had met her two years ago, when I could scarcely read, and she had spoken to me as she did to-day, I would have rumbled her hair! Two years ago—less than two years ago—just think of it!"

"A great change," said Collins. "I have worked in printing-offices nearly all my life, but I never saw any one learn so rapidly as you have."

"A wild vine, when it is taken from the woods and planted in the yard, where it is watered and cultivated, grows very fast; faster than if it had first come up in the yard."

Collins looked at the girl, slowly shook his head, and muttered, "You git away with me, blamed if you don't!"

"What did you say?" Ned asked.

"Nothing. Was trying to think of a quotation I once heard. Here's the boss. Come in, me noble duck!"

Len sat down and remained some time without saying anything. Ned glanced at him as if she would read his thoughts.

"Miss Pauline tells me that she has another one of

her excellent stories for us," said the editor. "Her home paper copied the first one."

"Her father took it around and had it put in, doubtless," Ned replied.

"Oh, I think not," Len rejoined. "It possessed quite sufficient merit to warrant its reproduction. She has promised to give us a picture of herself to hang in the office. Well, it is about time to stop work. I haven't felt disposed to do anything to-day. Ned, suppose we go."

"I am not ready to go yet."

"Well, I must proceed."

Ned followed him with her eyes, and when he was out of sight she took down her basket and started homeward. When she reached home she dropped the basket on the floor and threw herself upon a bed.

"Ned, air yer sick?" her father asked.

"No, sir."

"What's the matter with yer?"

"Tired; that's all."

The old man lighted a lamp and placed it on a table near the bed. As he did so, he caught sight of her face, which she attempted to conceal with her arms.

"W'y, gal, yer ain't cryin'? Tell yer old dad; has anything gone wrong?"

"No, sir."

"Wall, I never seed yer carry on this er way befo'. Ain't yer goin' ter eat no supper? I shot er lot er blackbirds down in ther fiel' an' have stewed 'em finer'n silk."

"I don't want any."

The old man mutteringly turned away. "Ned," he exclaimed, "here's Mr. Gansett! W'y, come in! Thar 'peers ter be suthin' ther matter with Ned this evenin', Mr. Gansett."

"No, there isn't," Ned replied, quickly arising. "Good-evening, Len."

"How are you, little girl? Thought I'd come over and spend the evening with you. Am I welcome?"

"You know you are," she replied, putting back her beautiful hair.

"It is very warm in here, Ned; suppose we go out and sit on a log."

They went to the log on which Len had so often seen the girl sit, listlessly gazing at that nothing from which we draw our most tranquil thoughts.

"Len, I told you that I would let you know when to talk of love."

"Yes."

"Well,"—nestling closer to him,—“you may—may talk of it now.”

Without replying he put his arms around her beautiful shoulders and pressed her head against him. Her glorious hair broke loose from its fastenings and veiled his bosom.

"Little angel," he said, "don't you know that I worship you?"

"I know," she breathed, "that I hope so. I know that I have prayed for your love. O Len, you don't know how my heart has ached this day! I was jealous; I know it, and acknowledge it. That woman—oh, I cannot help but dislike her—"

"Don't mention her, darling. She told me what you said to her, and I told her that I did not want any more of her stories."

"But, Len, why did you appear so indifferent to me when you came into the office?"

"Because I wanted to sit where we are now sitting; because, angel, I wanted you to tell me that I might talk of love."

"You wanted to make me jealous?"

"Yes."

"But," she said, as she put her arms around his neck and kissed him, "you must not do so any more. My heart is very tender, Len. It is very warm, dear, and a draft of cold air chills it."

"Well, darling, you shall not be exposed to the draft again."

"Ho, Gansett!" old man Hobdy called, "I've got the best blackbird stew yer ever seed. Ef yer an' Ned air through with yer 'portant bus'ness yer'd better come an' git some. W'y," he added, as he advanced and looked at Ned, "I never seed a gal improve so. Jes' now she wuz ailin'."

"My soul was ailing," the girl replied, "but the soul's physician has come."

"Then good-by ter the blackbirds," replied the old man. "No foolishness now. Come on!"

XXVI.

"LEN," said Ned, as she and the editor were walking toward the office the morning after the reconciliation, "you must promise me something."

"What another promise?"

"Yes."

"Will it be hard to keep?"

"Not so hard as the first one."

"Well, what is it?"

"You must promise me that after we are married I may continue to work in the office."

"That won't look very well, little girl."

"Why?"

"It might create the impression that I demanded your services; in fact,," he mischievously added, "people might think that I owe you, and married you to discharge the debt."

"Nonsense! you know they won't. When they notice how much better clothes I and my father wear, and how much better everything looks around our house, they must know that my wages are paid regularly. You haven't promised me," she added, taking his hand.

"You may go to the office with me, but you need not work. You may help me edit the paper."

"May I?" she joyously exclaimed.

"Yes."

"You are joking."

"No, I am in earnest."

"And you will let me write stories?"

"Yes, you may write as your inclinations suggest."

"That will be just splendid!" she happily exclaimed, seizing his arm in an embrace. "I believe I can write a story about the humble people I know. I can imagine all sorts of situations, and I know that I can write them down as I see them."

As they neared the office, Ned, looking up, said, "Yonder comes Mr. Dockery. Does he speak to you when he meets you?"

"Oh, yes; the little apology does not seem to have interfered with our social relations."

"Mr. Gansett," said the editor of the "Eagle of Freedom," "I desire to communicate with you a few moments, if Miss Hobdy has no objections."

"I have no objections," Ned replied.

Len stopped. Ned walked on toward the office.

"Let us sit down here," said Dockery, pointing to a grass-covered bank. They sat down, and Dockery, biting off a chew of tobacco from a thick plug covered with tin spangles, said:—

"Len, we have always advised with each other, and I do not feel disposed to take an important step without consulting you. I have made it a rule to act cautiously in serious matters, to which course I can attribute much of my success. When I was a boy I decided that many of our evils and mishaps come from rashness. Now, sir," placing one hand on Len's knee, "what I am going to say to you must go no further. I am, I gladly say, aware that with you a secret is sacred. I am in love. Hold on, now! I am not in love with Miss Hobdy. She

is an excellent lady, possessing many noble qualities, but I'm not in love with her."

"Who is the fortunate woman?" Len asked.

"The accomplished Miss Chackerin. My dear Gansett, my position has thrown me in contact with many estimable ladies; but, sir, I have never seen one who so strongly appeals to me as Miss Chackerin. I have met her several times, and each time I have become more attached to her. She is a writer of marked ability,—I'll publish one of her stories next week,—and I believe that she can soon learn to set type. Now, what do you advise?"

"Why, if you love her and she loves you, marry her."

"Sensible advice, Gansett; the very cream of judgment. Love her, my dear boy; I adore her! I admit that she is not beautiful, but beauty is a delusion. In selecting a life partner we must look more to character and disposition than to beauty."

"Have you spoken to her on the subject?"

"Only in a vague way. I complimented her work, and hinted that my life had become much brighter since she had come to Dogwood. She smiled; by George! sir, I wish you could have seen that smile. Never saw such a smile in my life. I can never forget it. I cannot endure the suspense much longer, and I shall take an early opportunity of telling her of my love and imploring her, from her throne of peerless worth, to decide my fate. Please do not mention what I have told you, Gansett, for you are the only man who possesses my confidence."

When Len entered the office Collins said, "Had a conversation with the Hon. Mangus, eh?"

"Yes."

"He gave me about an hour and a half of his valuable time this morning; took me into his confidence, called me his dear friend, and wanted me to advise him."

"What did you tell him?" Len asked.

"Told him to marry her. He said that he could not stand the suspense much longer, and said something about her throne of peerless worth. By George, here she comes!" Collins exclaimed. Miss Pauline Chackerin entered. Ned turned and gave her an inquiring glance. After bowing to Len and Collins, the school-teacher addressed Ned. "Miss Hobdy," said she, "I have come to apologize to you for my rudeness. I have ever been restive under criticism, and I know that I should have more sense, but won't you please forgive me?"

"We were both to blame," Ned replied, extending her hand, and then, noticing the type-dust upon her fingers, withdrawing it.

"Never mind the smut," said Miss Pauline. "The soil which honest labor leaves upon our hands is an honorable mark. I have no desire, Miss Hobdy, to antagonize you; on the contrary, I think that we should be on the best of terms. What are you writing now, Mr. Gansett? Some rascally joke, I warrant you. Heigho, I am getting tired of this country! The weather is so warm, and I freckle so easily, too. Oh, no," she added, when she had been three times invited to sit down, "I haven't time to stay more than a minute. Thought that I would come and ask Miss Hobdy's pardon. Mercy, how I do run on! You must be quite a hand at the business," addressing Collins.

"Yes'um."

"Did you ever set up the types for books?"

"Oh, yes; I set up two-thirds of the Sunday-school books you see throughout the country."

"Indeed! Now tell me, who writes the most of such books?"

"Many of them are written by the rattiest old bums—I mean drunkards—who wants to raise a stake. I know a fellow who writes dime novels half the week, and Sunday-school books the other half."

"You don't tell me."

"Yes, I think I do. Did you ever see a book, with imitation of variegated marble covering, entitled, 'Why Sweet Willie laid down His Life'?"

"No, sir."

"Well, that was written by a lunch rounder, named Jones."

"Yes, lunch rounder while in town, and a handout advocate while in the country."

"I don't know what you mean, but I must say that I do not believe you. Well, I must go. I gave the children a long recess in order to come up here; but, goodness,"—looking at her watch,—“it is time to take in. Good-by.”

Old Collins groaned when the school-teacher had gone. "A small dose of that fading damsel goes a long ways," said he.

"You should not speak so of the young lady," Len replied.

"Probably not, but it's true all the same. She makes me very tired."

"I must admit that she is not very refreshing. Her father owned too many negroes before the war," said Len.

"Yes, and especially as she has an Indiana accent," Collins suggested.

"You are right," said Len. "The daughter of an ex-slave owner may say 'I reckon,' and in a moment of forgetfulness may say 'dun gone,' and even 'gwine,' but she does not say 'noospaper,' and 'crick' for creek."

Collins shook his "case" with a loud rattle, and groaned; and then, with the printer's characteristic custom when speaking of the proprietor of a paper, looked at Ned, and remarked:—

"The old man sizes her up about right."

Shortly after Miss Pauline left the "Picket" office she was overtaken by Mr. Dockery.

"Ah, Miss Pauline, you are looking fresh this morning. Let me accompany you as far as the school-house."

"Thank you."

"Not at all. By the way, I am much pleased with your story."

"Then you accept it?"

"By all means. You may not like the way I shall bring it out, for it will appear in three different sizes of type."

"Haven't you enough type of one size?"

"Oh, yes; but—but different sizes give diversity to the appearance of a story. I had a story in 'Harper's Magazine,' some time ago, and by special request the editor—who is a friend of mine—had it set in three sizes of type. He rather liked the idea."

"Of course I do not know much of such matters," Miss Pauline said. "I can only judge of literary, and not of mechanical, excellence."

"I should think, Miss Pauline, that you would devote your life to literature."

"Nothing would make me so happy."

"Ah, I knew it. I told Gansett the other day that I wished that I was able to give you regular employment on my paper." Dockery glanced at the young lady's watch-chain. "I told him that if we were associated together that not only the State of Arkansas, but the entire country would soon hear of the 'Eagle of Freedom.' Don't walk so rapidly, Miss Pauline."

"I haven't the time to discuss the matter now, Mr. Dockery."

"Oh, it won't take us long."

"Why not call on me this evening?"

"Yes, I will. Oh, I think that we can come to some terms."

"I hope so."

"Well, good-by for the present."

That evening Dockery called on Miss Pauline. The weather was extremely warm, and at Dockery's suggestion they sat on the gallery. Braley passed, carrying a "middlin' uv meat." Sheet lightning flashed in the western sky. A brindle cow with deformed hip-bones stood in a patch of dog fennel, lowing mournfully. It was a propitious time for love-making, and Dockery, upon whom no feature of sentimental environment was lost, turned from a contemplation of the cow and remarked:—

"All nature seems to sing a song of love."

"Don't you think that it would be better for the nature which we find in this community to sing a song of sixpence?"

"Yes," Dockery laughingly replied, "a song of sixpence, bottle full of rye; especially the rye, as this is a prohibition town."

"You are so witty, Mr. Dockery."

Dockery nodded his head in recognition of the compliment, and replied: "Without wit, a man can do but little in the newspaper business; and," he added, "I found that wit was an appreciative quality in the legislature. After many opponents came to know me, neither of them, fearing a stinging repartee, would dare to lift his voice against me."

"You like politics, then?"

"I cannot say that I like the low-born workings of politics, but I confess that I like public life. I am at my best when under fire. I am naturally a man of courage."

"Such is my estimate of you, Mr. Dockery."

Again the editor nodded. Miss Pauline continued: "There is nothing I admire so much as courage."

"Except literature," Dockery suggested.

"Yes, I must except literature. Literature is my heart, my life's blood. My father is a literary man. Before the war, when he had nothing to do but to manage his estates, he wrote a great deal for publication."

"How is the old gentleman's health?"

"Very fair, considering his age."

"Has he sold much of his land?"

"Not a great deal."

"Nearly all his children living at home, I suppose?"

"I am the only child living."

"How long do you expect to remain here?"

"Oh, so long as it suits my fancy, or whim, as father would say."

"Do the trustees of the school pay you promptly?"

"I have never asked them for money. Yes, quite promptly."

"You remember that this morning I spoke to you with regard to my paper?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is growing every day."

"I am, indeed, glad to hear it."

"Miss Pauline, shall I be candid with you?"

"By all means, Mr. Dockery."

"Well—have you some water handy?"

"Yes, sir."

She brought a dipper of water. Dockery took a swallow and returned the dipper. When she had resumed her seat, Dockery said:—

"I am a very candid man."

"I admire candor," she remarked.

"When I was in the legislature," the editor continued, "my opponents all gave me the credit of being candid."

"It was generous of them."

"They could not help it."

"Indeed."

"Yes. So you want me to be candid with you?"

"Certainly."

"Well—get some more water—never mind, I've just

had a drink, thank you," he added, as though declining an invitation. "What I was going to say is this: I have never met a woman who so much impressed me as you have. In fact, Miss Pauline, I love you, and want you to be my wife. What do you say?"

"O Mr. Dockery, I don't know what to say. Your question comes so unexpectedly. I confess that I like you very much."

He reached over, took her hand, held it a moment and released it. "My business prospects are good," said he, "and, as I said before, we can make my—our paper a phenomenal success."

"Yes, I believe we could."

"And we must."

"You must give me time to think about it."

"How long?"

"A week."

"Well, it shall be as you say. As I have a great deal of writing to do I must go."

She followed him to the gate. The brindle cow looked at them and lowed. When Dockery had gone, Miss Pauline hurried to her room and wrote a letter to her father. The following is an extract from the letter:—

"Yes, I am to be married, and it is high time, as I am now thirty-three years old. The man, Mr. Dockery, is not handsome, but he has good prospects, and is an editor. This will give me a chance to write, and you know I have set my soul on it. I send you five dollars, which is all the money I can spare. Goodness knows our old house is bad enough, but if we can't afford to

pay the rent you'd better get a cheaper house. I will write you again soon."

"Reckon that's settled," Dockery mused as he walked along the dusty road. "I guess she loves me. She is not so bad-looking, and that watch and chain sets her off. Guess I'll wear it after a while. Women don't need watches. I think that after we are married I'll give up the newspaper business. If her father is the right sort of a man he won't mind taking me in with him. Hello, that you, Honeycut?"

"Whut's left uv me," Honeycut replied.

"Which way?"

"Jest knockin' 'round. Thought I'd call on Gansett, as I ain't seed him in a good while, but when I got ter his office it was shut up."

"Got business with him?"

"Yes. I hear he's goin' ter git married."

"I understand so."

"Wall, I've got a leetle suthin' ter say erbout it. Ther ole man promised that gal ter me er long time ergo, an' I ain't goin' ter gin er up so easy."

"I wouldn't, if I were in your place."

"Don't 'low ter, let me tell yer. Me an' Gansett ain't got much love fur each other."

"I don't think that Gansett and anybody else have very much love for each other."

"Me nuther; but ef he thinks that he ken work me he'll find that he's got the wrong sow by the year. I've got jest ernuff licker in me now not ter give a damn fur nobody, an' it won't be pie fur him ef he fools with me. I ain't no slouch. He tried ter kill me onct."

"You don't say so?"

"Reckon I do. Tried to fling me offen a bluff, an' I ain't furgot it, nuther. Got ernuff licker in me ter whip the fust feller and the next one what comes erlong, an' when I git afoul uv Gansett I won't use a broon-straw, nuther. Ain't afeerd uv hell'n'er high water. Got licker ernuff in me ter tell yer that. Never was downed by a man yit. Wall, so long. Ef anything happens, keep yer mouth shet. Got licker ernuff in me ter tell yer that."

XXVII.

HONEYCUT, staggering as he walked, turned away. Dockery, watching him mused: "Don't believe it would be very good for Gansett if he were to meet that fellow in the road. I haven't got anything particularly against Gansett, and would warn him of his danger if I were not afraid of Honeycut. He would accuse me of meddling in his affairs. Honeycut is a bad man. I haven't the physical courage to tackle bad men, but when it comes to moral courage I am essentially there."

Honeycut went to the "Picket" office, seized the doorknob, rattled the door, and exclaimed: "Come out ef yer air in thar! I'm fixed fur yer, an' ken whup Mort Haney an' ther whole kit an' b'ilin' uv yer. Got licker ernuff in me ter tell yer what I want yer ter un'erstan'. Ain't in thar, eh? Wall, I reckon I ken find yer."

He turned away, and with unsteady steps pursued his course toward old man Gansett's house. Once he stepped in a wagon-rut and fell. He scrambled up, clapped his hand on his side pocket, and said, "Thought I'd broke old Betsy, but I hain't, though. Come out, Bets, an' let me tilt yer."

He drew a bottle from his pocket, shook it, and held it up between himself and the sheet lightning which continued to flash in the west.

"Here's ter yer, ole red-eye," he said. "Lightnin' ter lightnin' an' dad's deal. Haw, haw, that ain't bad!

Here's at yer, dod rot yer!" He took a drink, returned the bottle to his pocket and continued his walk.

"I'm stirred up now," he muttered. "Ain't nothin' like gittin' er man's blood b'ilin' hot. Whup any man in the country. Got licker ernuff in me ter say that, an' do whut I say, too. Hi yah, you little son-of-a-gun!" A frightened dog had run across the road. Thunder rumbled in the far west, and the lightning became more vivid.

"I'll call ther whelp out an' put it ter him, an' ef the old man kicks I'll gin him er dose. Whoop! on thar war-path now, with plenty uv licker an' forty yards uv back-bone. Come out, Bets, an' lemme tickle yer. Whew!" he added, as he recorked the bottle, "I'm as hot as a guinea nigger er thinnin' co'n. B'l'ëve I'll rest erwhile an' then cut my capers; 'sides that, I ain't got quite licker 'nuff yit."

He stepped aside into the woods and sat down on a log, placing the bottle beside him; then, in a hoarse voice, he began to sing:—

"Nigger on er wood-pile, couldn't count 'leben,
Flung him in er feather-bed an' he thought he wuz in heben,
An' er, oh, Lawd, gals, come er git out uv ther wilderness"--

"Hell, whut's the use'n singin' when thar ain't nobody ter hear me?. Come here, Bets." He snatched up the bottle and drank. Then he leaned forward, with his elbows on his knees, and with his chin resting on the palms of his hands. "Bet yer life, ole Honeycut never furgits nothin'. Bet yer life, ef er man slights him he's got ter look out fur hisse'f. Go down thar

putty soon, an' stir things up with a sharp stick. Oh, I'm here, bet yer life on that! Come here, Bets. Whut's the matter with yer? Gittin' empty, eh? Wall, I know whar thar's mo' ter be found."

His head sunk lower. He muttered something, snored, and fell off the log. He did not get up, but stretched himself out and turned over on his back. Wind, vivid flashes of lightning, and deafening claps of thunder, but the wretch did not awake. Rain fell in torrents; still he slept, not on his back, for, with a drunken man's unconscious instinct, he had turned over on his side, and shielded his head with his arms. The rain was still falling when Honeycut sprang to his feet. He uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"My Lord, whut am I doin' here? Whar's my bottle? Empty!" he despairingly added. "Whar am I, anyway? Blamed ef I know. Wet as er drowned rat, but as dry as erbone. Some feller must've flung me up, wet ur dry, an' I must've come down on both sides at wunst. No use'n tryin' ter find my way outen here tell daylight. Gittin' lighter now, 'pears like. Let me see, whut wuz I goin' ter do anyway? Yes," he added, with a shudder, "I was on my way ter kill Gansett."

The shudder was not the result of the abhorrence in which he held the shedding of blood, but of thinking of his own danger. The darkness surrendered with reluctance; daylight came with faint and timid streaks.

"Humph!" grunted Honeycut; "I ain't fur frum ther road, an' I b'l'evе I'll shove away frum here. Gee whiz!" he exclaimed, when he had turned a bend in the road, "yander is old Gansett's house. Ef I'd er knowd I wuz

so clos't last night I woulde kep' on an' not sot down on that log. Mebbe it's er good thing fur somebody that I did stop, an' I don't know ef that somebody ain't me. Thar's ther ole man in ther yard. Never ketch him in bed airtter daylight. Who's that with him? Blamed ef it ain't Dockery. Lemme see, didn't I meet him last night B'l'eve I did. Wonder ef I said anything ter him erbout Gansett? Don't b'l'eve I'd better go by thar. Helloa, they see me, an' I mout's well face ther music. Thar's Len, too. They air all comin' out ter ther fence."

Dockery walked behind Len, apparently attempting to shrink from view.

"Good-mornin', gentlemen," was Mr. Honeycut's salutation as he reached the fence and placed his arms on the top rail. "Got out putty early, didn't yer? But yer wa'n't out as early as I wuz, fur I ain't been ter bed yit. Helloa, Dockery!—thought I left yer in town last night."

"I believe you did; that is, I remember seeing you in town about the time I had started to visit my esteemed contemporary here."

"Old man," said Honeycut, "lookin' well this mornin', fresh as er watermillon vine airtter er rain."

"I am feelin' very well," the old man replied.

"An' you," pursued Honeycut, addressing Len, "air all right, air yer?"

"Yes; with thanks for your kind inquiry."

"Not er tall, not er tall. Say, Dockery, ef yer ain't too busy I'd like ter see yer er minit."

Dockery pretended not to hear. He quickly looked at

Len, then at the old man, and then looked far away at nothing.

"Hear whut I said, Dock?"

"How's that?"

"I said ef yer wa'n't too busy I'd like ter see yer er minit:"

Dockery reluctantly passed out at the gate, and joined Honeycut. They walked a short distance away, neither of them speaking.

"I wanted ter ax yer," said Honeycut, stopping and placing one foot on a low stump, "ef yer said anythin' ter them fellows erbout our talk last night."

Honeycut was leaning forward with his elbow on his knee. He looked up at Dockery with a wicked squint.

"What talk?" the editor asked, nervously picking at a thread on his dingy coat-sleeve.

"The talk we had last night when I had so much licker aboard."

"Oh, that talk! Not a word, Honeycut; not a word."

"What made yer come over so soon airter I left?"

"Had particular business with Len."

"Whut bus'ness?"

"Oh, something with regard to the consolidation of our papers. Say, they are there waiting for me. Reckon breakfast must be ready."

"Wall, I must shove along. Recolleck I don't want no underhand bus'ness with me. Recolleck that even when I'm sober I am all wool, an' er little mo'n three-quarters uv er yard wide."

Dockery rejoined Len and old man Gansett. After leaving Honeycut the night before, the wily editor,

thinking that his time for making a strike had come, hurried to the Gansett farm. "If I warn Len," he mused, "he will do everything he can to help me into the good, an, I hope, profitable graces of old man Chackerin; and I am running no risk, for the fellow, even if he should hurt somebody and escape, can't remember that he met me. I can prepare Len, and when Honey-cut comes Len can shoot him, and that will be the end of it. If old Chackerin should fail to take me in, Len, in view of the service I have performed, will gladly consent to a consolidation of our papers. Then I can walk right into Congress."

Dockery, upon imparting his startling information, had been much cast down at the quiet demeanor of the old man and his grandson. The old man had merely remarked, "I knew a feller once that started out to kill a community of people, but he was shortly afterward took with the cramp an' died without seein' his friends."

Dockery, with the confused shadows of disappointment and dismay settling upon his face turned to Len, hoping to read some sign of alarm, but the young man had chilled him by this quiet observation: "Whiskey has different effects upon some people. Some people want to sing, others to dance, others to tell all they know,—which, barring repetition, would consume but little time,—and others want to fight."

When the rain came, the old man, much elated at the prospects of a good "season," went out and get wet, as usual, and when bedtime arrived Dockery was shown to a room. He had seen none of the preparations which alarm should inspire, and, after starting at every sound,

sank into a troubled sleep. Dockery thought of all this as he slowly walked back to the spot where Len and the old man were standing.

"Wanted to borrow five dollars of me," said Dockery, as he closed the gate.

"Did you let him have the money?" Len asked, winking at the old man.

"No, I told him that times were so hard that I couldn't afford it."

"Wonder why he didn't call on us last night?" the old man remarked.

"Must have got too drunk," Dockery rejoined; "but let me tell you, Len, keep an eye on him, for he's a bad man; and, by the way, if he should ever ask you why I came over last night, for the Lord's sake—and my own—don't tell him. He wouldn't hesitate to butcher me and head me up in a flour-barrel."

Immediately after breakfast Dockery returned to Dogwood. While Len was waiting for Ned to come along Colonel Bently rode up.

"Light, colonel, an' look at yer saddle," old Bob called.

"No, thank you, I haven't time. I want to see Len a moment."

By this time Len had reached the fence.

"How are you, my dear fellow?" said the colonel, holding out his hand.

They cordially shook hands. "No," said the colonel, in reply to a pressing invitation to get down, "I haven't time. I came over to ask a favor of you."

"It is granted before you name it."

"I thought so. For some time I have been thinking of going to England. I am an Englishman by birth, you know. I want to go back and look at the old country once more, and I want you, while I am away, to look after my house and affairs as well as you can. You needn't go over to the house very often, once every three days, say."

"Of course I will serve you to the fullest extent of my capacity, but you are not going at once, are you?"

"Oh, no, not immediately. I have considerable business to attend to before I leave; must go to Little Rock, and possibly to Galveston. I am now on my way to Oak Hill to complete the sale of my stage line. I am to meet a man there from St. Louis. Well, I'll see you again and have a long talk with you before I leave. Take care of yourself until I see you again."

A few moments later Ned made her appearance. She wore a new muslin dress, covered with pink prints of flowers. It could not have been made plainer, but it was the picture of neatness. She wore two roses in her hair, and around her waist she had gayly tied a belt of vines.

"Why, my little girl," said Len, advancing to meet her, "you look as though you were dressed for a festival."

"You sha'n't make fun of me," she laughingly said, and then, glancing toward the house to see if any one were looking, she snatched the vines from around her waist, and, holding both ends, threw them over Len's head, pulled him down and kissed him. When she had released him and bounded away he said, "Come, don't you think you'd better throw that delicious lariat again?"

"No, I don't, you rascal!"

"You started in with so much more affection than usual that I thought you might keep it up."

"But I'm not."

"Why are you dressed so beautifully this morning?"

"Keep away from me," she joyously cried. "You'll muss me all up. I came over to tell you that I am not going to work to-day. This is father's birthday, and we are going to spend it in the woods."

"Won't you let me spend it with you?"

"No, that wouldn't do."

"Why not?"

"Oh, don't you nunderstand? If you are with me I can't be the girl I was, and to-day I am going back in the past."

"But why do you wear that dress?"

"So when I look at it my heart can leap out of the past and swell in contemplation of the future. Won't you let me have my way?"

"Assuredly; but you have thrown down your lariat."

"Oh, I'll kiss you, but don't put your hands on me. There, and there," kissing him twice. "Now let me go. Was ever there a woman such a fool about a man?"

She ran away from him. The sun came out. He saw the roses nodding in the bright light as she ran down the hill.

Shortly after Len reached the office he received a note from Miss Pauline, asking him to call on her immediately. When he arrived at her boarding-house he found her standing at the gate.

"You must excuse my sending for you," she said, "but

I wanted to see you on *very* particular business. Goodness, I have not asked you to come in. How I *do* go on!"

"I haven't time to come in."

"Well, then, I must consult you out here. You are a comparative stranger to me, but I *do* feel as if I could confide in you. Girls have so few friends in whom they can rely anyway—there I go again. Well, what I am going to say is this, and I don't want you to breathe a word of it to anybody, not a living soul: yesterday evening Mr. Dockery came to see me and—now you are not to mention it—and asked me to be his wife. I was shocked, for the proposal was so unexpected. I did not give him a final answer, preferring rather to consult some one. What do you think I ought to do?"

"Miss Chackerin, I am the last man in the world you should consult."

"Why?"

"Because I am not competent to give advice with regard to such matters."

"Well, you can tell me this: What are his prospects?"

"I know nothing about his business."

"But don't you think that with my help his paper might be made to pay?"

"I cannot say."

"Well, then, I must rely on my own judgment."

While this conversation was going on Dockery was writing a letter to the postmaster of the town in which old man Chackerin lived.

XXVIII.

ONE evening Len received a note from Colonel Bently, requesting, if convenient, an immediate interview. Gansett answered the note by calling at the colonel's house.

"Ah, my dear boy," exclaimed the colonel, cordially seizing Len's hand, "I knew you would come! I did not like the idea of placing you under the slightest inconvenience, and would have called on you, but really, in my present state of hurry and bustle, I could but ill spare the time."

"Don't mention it," Len replied, seating himself in an arm-chair which the host had brought forward. "Have you perfected all your arrangements?"

"Not satisfactorily. I have failed to dispose of my stage line. The man made his appearance, but having heard, while in the neighborhood, that the stage was sometimes robbed, he gracefully withdrew, and returned to St. Louis. But I shall not allow this to interfere with my trip. I would go now that I have made up my mind, even if I were compelled to sacrifice everything I possess. Would it be asking too much to request you to go out to Oak Hill occasionally? I haven't, as you are aware, much confidence in my driver, and I do not think that my agent at Oak Hill is above turning a dishonest penny now and then."

"My dear colonel," Len rejoined, warmly, "you cannot ask too much of me."

"Thank you, my dear boy. It is positively refreshing

to meet a man who has so fine a sense of accomodation. Understand, now, you are not to put yourself to any trouble. I don't want you to neglect a single thing your duty to yourself says must be performed. To you my interests must be of minor consideration. Everything, I trust, will go on smoothly, that is, as smoothly as heretofore; and, assured that you will throw out an occasional glance in my behalf, the waves of the old ocean may toss me, the blanching cliffs of my native land may throw at me ill-boding look, my native town, where William of Orange first set his foot in England, may refuse to greet me with a single gleam of welcome, yet I shall feel perfectly easy with regard to my interest here. Not another word, Gansett," he added, as Len made a motion with his hands, expressive of the obligations which overwhelmed him; "not another word. I want no promises. I only want to know that you will not entirely forget me. There' I have wearied you with my profuse estimate of your services. John," addressing a negro boy who had just made his appearance, "Mr. Gansett will stay all night and see me off in the morning. Not another word, now. Come, supper is ready."

After supper the two men talked until the clock struck a late hour. The colonel explained his plans. He was so much wrapped up in his contemplated visit to his old home that he did not look beyond it.

He fell into reminiscence, then sank into history. He would approach his home with the admiration of a student, and would bound ashore with the enthusiasm of a delighted boy. His people had never been great in history, having espoused the parliament's cause in the

great civil war, but they had always commanded respect in their neighborhood. "I shall," the colonel said, "tremble with none of the emotions which seize a man who returns to a home where familiar scenes await him. There are no great trees well known in childhood, nor no gushing springs associated with youth, to await me,—for I cannot remember when I left the country,—but I feel that I shall approach as the Oriental approaches a mosque at whose shrine his fathers worshipped. I shall feel the grandeur which ages have woven into wreaths and wound about the summits of the old hills; and the stars, to me, will seem as though from time immemorial they have been set to watch over the scene."

Early the next morning the colonel, bidding Len farewell, was driven to Oak Hill.

The Hon. Mangus Dockery had not long to wait for an answer to his letter, making inquiry of Miss Pauline's father. The postmaster wrote as follows: "Old man Chackerin has been living here several years; came from Indiana, I believe. He may have been a great slave-owner in his time, but if he did it was under a special act of Congress. The old fellow is a sot. I am told that he is a pretty fair shoemaker, which is much to his credit, but he has long since degenerated into an unreliable cobbler. He owns no property, and if you hear a man who ever collected a debt which the old fellow owed, please forward his name at once. Barring the fact that he has never been detected in telling a truth, he is a pretty good sort of fellow. His daughter, partly by her own force of will and partly by subscription, received a very fair education. She might have done well here

if she had not, after her return from school, considered herself superior to every one in the community. It may not be of interest, but I will say that she created quite a sensation here some time ago by suing a well-known lawyer for breach of promise. If the old man owes you anything, please accept my sympathy. If you want my bill against him I will send it to you."

Mr. Dockery groaned when he read the letter, and, although his office was well ventilated, he raised the window and stuck his head out, much after the fashion of the deputy sheriff who calls people into court. He let down the window, went out, looked toward Miss Pauline's school, and frowned. Then he returned to his desk, slammed a chair made of twine strings and pine boards against the wall—which made the house shake—and said, "Catch anybody picking me up! Catch any woman making a fool of me! I haven't lived here for nothing. Needn't think I am a summer coon. Thinks she's caught me, but she's off. Came into this neighborhood representing herself as a princess; but I'll show her what's what. Nobody can pick me up. No, Hon. Mr. Dockery," he added, as he caught sight of himself in a three-cornered fragment of looking-glass, tacked against the wall, "no lady can play you for a sucker. Some people—ignorant people, I must say—may consider Mangus Dockery a sucker; but he is not. Mangus is on top; and don't you forget that. Even if his marriage is null and void, don't forget that he can work Gansett, who is indebted to him for his life. Now, young lady, you must shift for yourself. You may be accomplished and all that, but Mr. Dockery—the Hon. Mr. Dockery,

if you please—cannot afford to throw himself away on you. He would love you—yes, if you had not deceived him, but as it is, you must take your chances. Miss Pauline, I am afraid I must bid you an extended adieu.”

Mr. Dockery had received a note from Miss Pauline, in which that young lady confessed her devouring love for him, together with a happy concurrence in the marriage proposal. Dockery had, in an unrestrained gush of sentiment, answered the note. He told the young lady that without her his life would be a barren waste. Why he expressed himself in a manner so original is not known. It is somewhat singular that other men have not said, “without you my life would be a barren waste.”

“I am committed to call upon you this evening,” Mr. Dockery continued to muse; “but, Maid of Athens, Tennessee, thou shalt feel that thy lover hath departed, and that the cool, unruffled, and severe critic has taken his place. Maid of Rome, Georgia, the man in whom this intelligent community placed its most sacred trust may be generous to a fault, and forgiving to a degree almost unbecoming to a statesman, but he cannot quietly submit to a marriage which, however advantageous to the other party, is disastrous to himself. Maid of Alexandria, Arkansas, farewell!”

At the appointed time Dockery called at the house where Miss Chackerin irritated a nervous old piano, and ate beefsteak fried in ham-fat and ancient lard. She met him with a gracious smile, and gracefully wheeled an arm-chair into position for him. When he had seated himself, she placed an ottoman—a small cheese-box covered with a piece or rag carpet—near the chair, sat

down upon it, clasped her hands over Mr. Dockery's knee, looked with soft eyes at him, and said:—

"The shadows of evening come and darken the earth, but love, mingled love, makes all things bright."

Dockery nervously twisted himself in his chair, looked away at the village cow, which just at that time was lifting a yard gate off its hinges, and replied, "Yes, that's a fact."

Miss Pauline, looking searchingly at him, responded: "By commonplace acknowledgement, sentiment loses half its charm. You seem cool and distant this eve."

"I am not cool," Dockery answered, as he mopped the perspiration from his face. "If I were, I would not ooze so freely, and being so near you is a refutation of your assertion that I am distant."

"Come, Mangus, I am too tender to be joked. The birds twitter, but they do not joke with each other. Let us be serious."

"I am serious," Dockery answered, in a tone so rasping that Miss Pauline unclasped her hands. "This is a time to be serious, Miss Chackerin; it is my painful duty to tell you that our warm relationship must end. I hold you in the highest esteem, understand, and shall ever be willing to assist you; but my duty to my constituents—I mean my duty to myself, forbids our marriage."

The young lady did not become excited. She did not seize a handkerchief and press it to her eyes, but, arising from the ottoman and taking a sort of whalebone position, suggestive of being ready to spring, she replied:—

"Your mind, I fancy, is playing you odd capers."

"Oh, no, not at all. I find that my prospects are not so bright as I thought. My subscription list has begun to fall off and my advertising patronage has begun to shrink. I dislike to tell you this, but is my duty."

"I can help you to regain what you have lost."

"I don't think you can. In times of prosperity a woman may be a blessing in a printing-office, but at time of adversity she is a curse."

With demeanor distressingly calm, in a voice dangerously firm, Miss Pauline said:—

"Mr. Dockery, in your dealings with shallow-minded people vacillation may count as an evidence of genius, but I wish to assure you that I am not shallow-minded, and that I shall not permit any vacillation to interfere with my plans. You have asked me to be your wife; I have consented."

"Yes, but now I tell you that I am in no condition to marry you."

"Yes, you are."

"I tell you that I am not. I am a married man. My wife lives in Texas."

Even this did not shock her. "Mr. Dockery," she calmly replied, "I admire a skilful falsehood, but I detest a clumsy one."

"You don't believe that I am married?"

"No;" but I believe that you soon will be."

"Here, read this," said Dockery, taking from his pocket the postmaster's letter, and handing it to her. She read the letter, and without the slightest emotion returned it to him. "It is a very well written letter,"

she said. "I did not know the fellow could write so well."

"Great Lord, woman!" Dockery exclaimed; "does nothing have any effect on you?"

"Nothing produces no effect. *Something* must be introduced to produce an effect upon me. Oh, I see your disappointment. You thought that I was a giddy, simpering girl, and found that I am—"

"Old enough to be my mother," Dockery suggested.

She laughed, turned down the light which was burning too high, and replied, "In sense, yes; in other respects, no. You expected to hear sobs and see tears to-night, but you are disappointed. I desire to tell you, sir, that I am no fool. There is only one person in this neighborhood sharp enough to deal with me, and that person—and I cannot help but admire her—is that self-educated Miss Hobdy. Oh, you expected to hear me rattle off a rhapsody, eh? Well, I have not. Now, sir, I shall be plain with you. I must be your wife; not particularly because I love you, but because I have set my heart upon it. You cannot escape me. I have a note from you, in which you acknowledged your love for me, and in which you speak of our approaching marriage. I have taken care to preserve this bit of writing, not on account of its sentiment, but on account of its value as testimony. The letter which you received from the postmaster tells you that I once sued a man for breach of promise. Yes, and the money which I received paid for a scholastic course which I was desirous of taking."

"That's all very well," Dockery broke in; "but a suit

brought against me would not yield money enough to buy a supper for a grasshopper."

"Oh, I am perfectly aware of that, Mr. Dockery. I know that you are worthless, but I shall sue you, nevertheless."

"You won't get anything."

"But I can ruin your prospects."

"I have no prospects."

"You have a back."

"A back?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I shall sue you, and then publicly horse- whip you. O Mr. Dockery," she added, seizing a fan which lay on the old piano, "old maids are not always weak. Don't stare at me. I am not dangerous. I have told you the result of your refusing to marry me. Now let me tell you the result of your compliance. I shall do everything I can to advance you. I will not fill up your paper with sentimental stories, but will write of happenings, such as will please our readers. I will learn to set type and to manage the business. There are enough people in this community to support two papers, and our paper must be supported. I know that you are a man of some reading,—shallow reading,—and that in a certain way you may become useful to your interests. If you refuse to love me, you must obey me."

Dockery got up, approached the door, placed his hand on the knob, turned and said:—

"You're a hell of a woman!"

"You have stated the case," she replied, advancing.

"You want to crush me."

"No, that would be no achievement."

"If you think so little of me, why do you want to marry me?"

"That is a question which almost puzzles me. Fate must have decreed it."

"And I suppose fate decreed that you should marry the man whom you sued?"

"Oh, no; but fate did decree that he should give me money to assist my education."

"I wish you had married him."

"So do I."

"Let me make a proposition."

"I am willing."

"I will leave it to Gansett."

"All right. Shall we go now?"

"No; he is not at his office. Let us wait until to-morrow."

"I agree. You will abide by what he says?"

"Yes; but you must not see him before I do."

"I won't."

"I think that he will decide in my favor," said Dockery.

"If he does, you will not hear a word of complaint from me."

"Suppose we leave it to Gansett and Miss Hobdy?"

"I am willing."

"Why are you willing?"

"Because I believe that they will act rightly, and because I know that my cause is right."

XXIX.

ALTHOUGH Dockery had promised Miss Pauline that he would not seek an opportunity of conferring with Len previous to an appointed time, when they should both call upon him and Miss Hobdy, yet very early the next morning Dockery went over to old man Gansett's house. He had not time to go into the house, he declared, when old Bob opened the door in response to Dockery's holloa at the gate.

"Tell Len to come out a minute, please. I want to see him on very particular business."

Len soon appeared, scarcely able to repress a laugh when he noticed Dockery's ludicrously anxious face.

"Come in, Dockery!"

"No, my dear friend, I haven't time. Say, can you take a short stroll with me?"

"Only a very short one, for breakfast will soon be ready."

They slowly walked along the road winding among the trees. "Gansett," said the editor of the "Eagle of Freedom," "to me you have been a friend of value and information. I have come to you for advice—even before you were a professional—when I would not have gone anywhere else. I hope, sir, that you appreciate the confidence I have felt in your ability and integrity. Now, sir, I again come to you, and I hope that you will not only advise me as—as—as I desire to be advised, but that when the question is finally left to you, and some

one else whose name I shall in time reveal, that you will decide in my favor."

He then gave an account of his last interview with Miss Pauline. "And now, dear Gansett," affectionately placing his hand on Len's shoulder, "will you step in and save me from a designing woman, whom I have learned to despise? Would you see me humiliated, my usefulness crushed, my life blasted? I see, by the noble expression of your eyes, that you would not. Give me your hand, my dear Gansett. Thank heaven that degeneration has not placed its blighting hand upon every man!"

"You may depend upon me, Dockery."

"God bless you, Gansett! God bless you, my dear boy! You are a genius, if there ever was one. Well, I must hurry back now. When the affair comes up be sure that you do not, by even a look or a nod, give the fair one an inkling of what has taken place this morning."

"Leave all that to me, Dockery."

"I'll do it, my dear friend; I'll do it. Oh, I knew that you would not forget the service which I recently rendered you."

"Won't you take breakfast with me?"

The editor of the "Eagle of Freedom" was possessed of a keen appetite, and he had never been known to decline an invitation to eat; yet, on this occasion, so pressing was the necessity of his speedy return to the village that he positively refused to eat.

"It makes me shudder to think of marrying that woman," he mused, as he hurried over a "near cut" through the woods. "It is startling to contemplate the

impudence of low-bred people. Ah, my lady, the man who handles the instrument which is mightier than the sword will give you a turn to-day that you will not soon forget."

Dockery was in his office, making a pretence of great industry when Miss Pauline called upon him.

"It is nearly school-time," she said, "and as you did not call for me I was afraid that you had forgotten your promise."

"Never forgot a promise in my life, my dear Miss. Take a seat."

"No, we have no time to waste. Let us go at once."

"I am ready."

"And I am delighted at your willingness."

"Needn't be," Dockery muttered to himself, as he raked a pile of exchanges into the corner.

When they had entered the "Picket" office Len made a sign to Collins, who immediately withdrew. Ned and Miss Pauline began a vivacious discussion of neighborhood affairs, while Len and Dockery spoke of the political situation. After a while they gathered about a table, when Dockery briefly stated the cause of the visit. He made a speech so forlornly absurd that his auditors laughed. "It is no laughing matter," said the recalcitrant lover. "It is almost a case of life and death."

When he had concluded, Miss Pauline said: "The strangeness, I may say the ridiculousness, of this affair is painfully apparent, and I would gladly wash my hands of it but for my determination that Mr. Dockery shall not play with me as though I were a toy. He asked me

to be his wife. I gave my consent; but when he found that I was not a daughter of rich parents—”

“Hold on!” Dockery interposed; “you doubtless mean that when I found that I had been deceived.”

“You have made your speech, sir. If I deceived you more than you deceived me it was not due to your scruples, but due to the fact that my chances were better than yours. I think I am capable of making him a good wife.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt that, Miss,” Dockery exclaimed.

“Well, then,” said Len, “if you do not doubt it, we think that you should marry her.”

Dockery’s eyes bulged out. “Don’t joke, Gansett!” he gasped.

“It is no joke, Dockery. All men agree that marriage is serious.”

Dockery: “I appeal to Miss Hobdy.”

Ned: “Mr. Gansett has expressed my opinion.”

Miss Pauline (with a smiling bow): “I thank you for the justice of your decision.”

Dockery (struggling to suppress his indignation): “There is no justice about it. Gansett you have not treated me fairly. Remember that I one time saved your life.”

Gansett (good-humoredly): “And that I now advise you to make this girl your wife.”

Dockery (furiously striking the table): “This is no occasion for foolish rhyme.”

Gansett (laughing): “Nor for violent action.”

Dockery (to Ned): “Miss Hobdy, I though better of you.”

Ned: "In compliment of me you might have thought worse."

Dockery: "This beats any farce I ever heard of. Miss Chackerin, you surely did not think that I was in earnest when I proposed to leave this affair to Gansett."

Miss Pauline: "I took you at your word."

Dockery: "You should not have done so. The whole thing was a joke. Ha, ha (mirthlessly)—only a joke. I am a humorist, miss."

Miss Pauline: "I am glad to know it. I have often heard that humorists haven't enough willforce to make bad husbands."

Dockery (contemptuously): "Woman, I cannot help but pity you."

Gansett (with feigned enthusiasm): "That is an excellent sign of our fair progress, for does not Dryden tell us that pity melts the mind to love?"

Dockery: "He told a lie if he referred to me."

Gansett: "My dear sir, we do not know but the entire poem of 'Alexander's Feast' was written for you; and, presuming so, it is our duty to protect the memory of the great poet against calumny."

Dockery: "Oh, you be blamed! Gansett, you needn't think that you can make fun of me."

Miss Pauline (with a sigh): "I fear that we cannot make anything of you."

Dockery: "Oh, you be blamed, too!"

Gansett: "He has, himself, degenerated into foolish rhyming."

Dockery: "If I have made a rhyme it was unintentional. Well, I don't think there's any use in further

discussing this unpleasant affair. If I were a woman, and was so anxious to get married as Miss Chackerin is, I would surely drown myself."

Miss Pauline (bowing resignedly): "I cannot refute the imputation that I am anxious to get married. The fact that I am willing to take you proves it."

Dockery: "Gansett, I shall not forget you."

Gansett: "Thank you."

Dockery (sarcastically): "Oh, you needn't feel under any obligations. You told me that you would decide in my favor."

Miss Pauline: "Have you had a previous consultation with Mr. Gansett, and that, too, after promising that you would not?"

Dockery (somewhat confused): "Well, I happened to see him this morning, and—"

Pauline: "What time?"

Gansett: "About five o'clock."

Pauline (to Dockery): "Yes, it was all a joke, and you *are* a humorist. I should think that a humorist would cut a melancholy figure in court."

Dockery: "Hang the court! I don't pay any attention to it."

Pauline: "Then I am driven to act, to some extent, upon Judge Lynch's plan."

Dockery: "How?"

Pauline: "You force me to take the law into my own hands."

Dockery: "What can you do?"

Pauline (with dangerous composure): "I can shoot a pistol with remarkable accuracy."

Dockery (turning pale): "You certainly would not commit an act of violence."

Pauline: "Justice must come, regardless of price."

Dockery: "I'll go down and swear out a peace-warrant."

Pauline: "You might do that if you succeed in reaching the magistrate's office."

Dockery began to tremble. He wiped his perspiring face, and after a struggle with himself, said: "It has been my rule in life to avoid violence, and I would rather suffer than be the cause of any one committing a rash act. I will marry you, Miss."

"When?"

"One week from to-day."

"No."

"Well, when?"

"Now."

"Gansett, you see she will not even give me time to say my prayers. I have read of many an outrageous affair, but this one stands without precedent. I am resigned. I am ready."

She took his arm, smiled upon him, and, as she gently drew him toward the door, said: "I know that this is a little out of the regular order of things, dear; but do we not see new sights and experience new feelings every day? It is the nature of man to trample upon woman. Some do so in a more gentle and refined way than others, yet they all trample upon her. Mr. Gansett, will you and Miss Hobdy come down and witness the ceremony?"

Len consented, but Ned excused herself. The bridal party soon reached the magistrate's office, where Mr.

Mangus Dockery and Miss Pauline Chackerin were married.

Mrs. Dockery continued to teach school after her marriage, and it was observed that the editor of the "Eagle of Freedom" got around more among the farmers who came in from the surrounding country. Marriage either lowers or lifts a man, either stimulates his ambition or saps his energy.

One day, when Dockery's honeymoon had reached its first quarter, the bridegroom, meeting Gansett, said:—

"Wait a minute, my dear boy, I want to speak to you." He was nervously energetic, and he had a sort of startled air in suddenly looking about him. "Gansett, I have often heard that everything turns out for the best, and I now believe that the saying is true. Before my marriage I cared but little for money. You know that I simply threw it away; but now, sir, every nickel counts. My wife is the most extraordinary woman I ever saw. You might seine the entire country and you could not find another one like her. Sense! Why, sir, that woman is the concentration of wisdom. She actually knows more than I do; does, hanged if she don't! She gave up her school the other day, and now she proposes to devote herself to our office. My office had a little mortgage—a cloud about the size of a man's hand—hanging over it, but she has lifted it. Tell you another thing that remarkable woman has done. She has rented a small farm, near town, and has decided that I shall devote my spare time to it. She is firm,—firm as white oak; but then she is so gentle that I would not for the world wound her feelings by disobeying her."

"I am glad that you and your wife are so well suited to each other, Dockery."

"Suited! ~ Why, Gansett, I never saw the like. I owe you an everlasting debt of gratitude. Man often blindly throws stumbling-blocks into the path of his own interest, and the reluctance which I exhibited with regard to my marriage, I now see, was opposed to my future usefulness. Yes, my dear friend, you assisted in making a man of me. By the way, when are you and Miss Hobdy to be married?"

"Very soon."

"Glad to hear it, my dear boy. Put it there," extending his hand. "I tell you, sir, a man amounts to nothing until he is married. Think of gentle arms that twine about your neck, of soft and soothing words that fall like balm upon your overworked brain. Here comes my wife."

Mrs. Dockery, who was evidently in search of her husband, approached.

"Mangus," she said, "what are you doing here?"

"Consulting my friend Gansett with regard to a business proposition."

"I don't know that you could consult a better man, Mangus; but did I not tell you to go over to Parker's and get the steers, and to haul some wood?"

"Yes, and I am going immediately. I know as well as any one that printers' wood should be hauled up during warm weather. It is on the same principle of that wise adage, 'In time of peace prepare for war.' I think, though, my dear, that Parker is using his steers to-day."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, well, he told me some time ago that he always used them on Wednesdays."

"Yes, but this is Thursday."

"That's a fact. Well, I'll go over at once. Gansett, let me see you a moment," drawing Len aside. "Say, I wish you would tell her that there is plenty of time to get in the wood, and that I ought to be hustling for subscribers among the country people."

"I don't believe," Len smilingly replied, "that it would be safe to interfere with her plans."

"Why, my dear friend, she is the gentlest creature in the world. She is afraid that I'll have to go out in the cold next winter and chop wood. I tell you that she is the most considerate creature in the world. The fact is, she is too careful of me."

"Mangus!"

"Yes, dear."

"Are you going after the steers?"

"Yes, in a minute."

"Well, go on, then."

Dockery imploringly gripped Len's arm, gave him an appealing look, and slowly sauntered away, not unlike a "hang-back" boy forced to execute a task. He looked back to see if Len were talking to Mrs. Dockery, then, without increasing his gait, disappeared behind a stable.

Mrs. Dockery, smiling blandly, turned to Len and said: "Woman has gained one victory. Tell me, Mr. Gansett, don't you think that I am the most peculiar woman you ever saw?"

"You are certainly remarkable."

"I determined, long ago, not to be one of the hum-

drum sort. With all of my seeming imperiousness, I like Dockery. He amuses me, and I don't see how I ever got along without him. I do not intend to hen-peck him, but he must understand that we shall make a living. Isn't that Mr. Collins coming?"

"Yes, he has been to the post-office."

Among the letters which the printer handed Len was one bearing a foreign postmark. It was from Colonel Bently.

XXX.

The letter, dated at London, ran as follows:

MY DEAR LEN—Before coming here, I visited Devonshire, where my ancestors were born. I cannot convey to you even a suggestion of the strength of my emotions as I stood on that hallowed ground.

Please do not forget to visit my house, and to take an occasional ride out to Oak Hill. I would write you a long letter, telling you all about my trip, but I am too tired; besides, I have not recovered from the effect of that reverential rush of memory which a visit to this country must inevitably bring upon the man who, born here, has long been removed from the scenes of his infancy.

"I can truthfully say," said Len, when he had shown the letter to Ned, "that I have not neglected my duty so far as his house is concerned."

"Yes; but you haven't been out to Oak Hill but once."

"That's a fact; I must go again. I think to-morrow will be a good time. We are pretty well along with the paper, are we not?"

"Yes, it is nearly up."

"Suppose you go with me. We can go out early at morning and start back in the afternoon, immediately after the train comes."

"Of course I would like to go anywhere with you."

"Yes, because it is your nature to inspire happiness, as it is the nature of the sun to scatter bright beams."

"If it were not so easy for you to pay graceful compli-

ments, Len, I would tell you not to put yourself to any trouble on my account."

"It is always easy to speak the truth, little girl."

"No, the truth is often hard to tell. It is hard to handle because it is so strange."

"You aptly take possession of an old adage and make its heart circulate the life-blood of your own illustration. Will you come over to our house early to-morrow morning, or shall I call for you?"

"I will come to your house."

Ned came at the appointed time. What a joyous ride it was! There were no other passengers. Len had never before seen Ned so frolicsome. She bounded from from one seat to another, happy in the exuberance of her own blithe nature, and happy in the thought that her liveliness pleased Len. She seemed to give up her soul to the occasion; she was at once a quick-witted woman and a delightful child. Every one who has travelled through this part of Arkansas is willing to swear—unless ladies who never swear except in cases of breach of promise—that the rivers, of which there are many, exceed, in beauty of margin and clearness of water, any rivers that have worn their channels in the green footstool of the great Master of life. At a distance they seem to be strips of pure sky, imbedded in a setting of gray, and when approached you think that the fountains of the gods are overflowed, and that one of their streams is sweeping past you.

"What makes you so thoughtful?" Ned asked when

the stage-coach had descended a gentle slope into a stream.

"Am I silent?"

"Yes."

"Then it must be that the beauty, the grandeur through which we are passing combine to deprive me of the power of speech. As I look upon this scene," waving his hand, "I think that I have never before been so close to nature. It makes me realize my nothingness. Wait a minute, driver. Don't drive out until I tell you." He opened the door of the coach and stood with one foot on the wheel.

"Come on," said the girl. "You are so much in love with nature that I am jealous of her. You must know that I am a woman, and that everything that draws your attention from me is my rival."

"Nature is not your rival, sweet girl, for nature is the stalk, and you are the bloom."

"Don't talk so loud. The driver might hear you."

"He wouldn't know what we are talking about if he did."

"Don't you fool yourself," said the driver, gathering up his reins. "I know all the fishin'-holes along this creek. Know where Atkinson put out his trout-line. Look out, thar! Get ep!"

A hurried cloud came, a cloud which follows a water-course and leaves the upland dry, and rain began to fall.

"This only adds comfort to beauty," said Len, "for it brings to us a thought of our own snugness. We never know what comfort is until some outside agency im-

presses us. I don't suppose, however, that the driver is of my opinion."

Just then the stage-coach stopped under the spreading branches of a tree. The driver, descended from his lofty perch, placed his back against a tree, popped his whip, and said:—

"I've driv stages a good deal in my time, but this here is the wust country I ever driv over. 'Thar ain't nothin' along the line ter int'rest a feller. Wall," taking his hat by the brim and shaking it, "reckon the shower is about over."

The tourists, after arriving at Oak Hill, went to a hotel to get dinner. The sign, held up by two saplings, proclaimed the fact that the place was the New York Hotel. The proprietor, about whom everything seemed to be yellow, had a cough, which he said was caused by the inactivity of his liver. He had approached so near the grave that the yellow clay was on his feet, yet his anxiety concerning the few dimes which occasional guests dropped into his yellow hand was so strong that it often seized him and fiercely shook him. His wife had acquired much flesh, and had a very handy way of boxing the children, of whom there were seven, from one side of the room to the other. When she boxed a boy it seemed that, recognizing the fact that she had boxed him in the wrong direction, she would immediately box him back again. Her life seemed to be largely devoted to the correction of such errors.

"Jest make yourselves at home," said the landlord, addressing Len and Ned. "My name is Miller, yes, and I come from West Tennysy. Yes, I've been here five

month. Yes, I come here for my health. My liver ain't right. Jest set down till I bring some fresh water. Yes, we've got putty good water, but it don't appear to do my liver no good. Martha," speaking to his wife, "don't you see Virginia foolin' with the lady's hat?"

Mrs. Miller promptly arose, boxed Virginia in the wrong direction, then boxed her back again. "Now, I'arn to keep your han's off'm things. Don't you blubber an' cry 'round here. Eli," turning to her husband, "when air yer goin' ter git that fresh water?"

"Right now, yes." He soon returned with a bucket of water which he placed on the shelf outside the door. "Help yourselves," said he. "Good water, and I did think that it would help me, but it hain't. My liver ain't right. How long mout you be goin' to stay with us?"

"Until after dinner. We are going back soon after the train comes," Len replied.

"On a sort of a bridal tower, I reckon."

"No."

"Didn't know but you had just got married an' come out to look at the cars. Where do you live?"

"Dogwood."

"Way out thar? W'y that's mighty nigh outen the world. Yes, what business are you in?"

"I publish the 'Picket.'"

"Well, I've seed a copy or two. What air you holdin' it at?"

"Two dollars per year."

"I would sign fur it, but times air too hard. I have a pretty tough time, specially as my liver ain't right.

Martha, you'd better see about dinner fur it'll soon be train-time."

On the return there were several passengers, greatly to the disappointment of Len and Ned, who had hoped that no one would disturb them in their enjoyment of the beautiful rivers and grand scenery. One of the passengers, an elderly man, who travelled for a well-known whiskey-house, and who, of course, did a good business all over Arkansas, had come down from Missouri, where, using his words, a train had just been stopped, and the passengers "held up" by robbers.

"Were you on the train?" one of the passengers asked.

"Yes; and I just had time to shove my watch into my boot-leg. They got my pocket-book and pistol."

"Why didn't you shoot them?"

"I didn't have any business with them. Strangers to me, as the fellow said. Wonder what we're stopping here for? Say, driver, why don't you go ahead?"

"I've lost the king-bolt."

"You ought not to lose king-bolts in this republican country."

"Not republican," the driver replied, looking around. "Goes democratic every time."

"That's all right. Say, can't you dispense with royalty and go ahead? I've got business to attend to."

"Kain't move a peg till I get that king-bolt, or one like it. Thar's a blacksmith shop about a mile from here, an' you'll hafter wait till I ken go thar an' have a bolt made. Mighty sorry, but it's as hard on me as it is on any o' the rest o' yer. Here's a nice place for a

picnic, an' yer'd better commence ter make yerselves at home. What time have yer got, cap'n?"

The whiskey-drummer took out his watch, held it in the palm of his hand, glanced at it, closed it with a snap, returned it to its place, looked about him, and then said, "Three fifteen."

The driver hurried away, and the passengers proceeded to make the best of their situation. They sat under the trees, listening to the whiskey-man, whose stories were much older than his liquors, but whose stock on hand seemed to be inexhaustible. He even went so far as to repeat jokes which he had heard at minstrel shows,—actually said that he had two birds, one named Wheeler and the other Wilson, because neither one of them was a singer. This atrocity merited the severest punishment. One man, who looked like a preacher by the expression of his countenance, but like a sinner by the expression of his mouth, sighed wearily, and said:—

"For the Lord's sake, Parker, let up! You are enough to give a man the jim-jams."

Len and Ned strolled through the woods. To them the delay was not tiresome, for it liberated them from a company in which they took no interest. It must have been at least five o'clock when the driver blew his horn to summon his scattered passengers.

"King-bolt's all right, eh?" said the whiskey-man, as he got into the coach.

"Reckon it'll stay with us a while," the driver replied, as he shut the door.

The lengthening shadows, creeping down into the ravines lent a gloomy grandeur to the rocks, and the

streams seemed to run with more noise now that the night drew near.

"This country may do for the long-haired and wild-eyed poet," said the drummer, "but it won't do for your Uncle Fuller," meaning himself. "Your Uncle Fuller can put up with a good deal, but his endurance has its boundary lines. Suppose those horses were to get scared and run off down there. It would give your Uncle Fuller as much as he could do to take care of the ladies. You live out here somewhere, eh?" addressing Len.

"Yes, at Dogwood."

"Dogwood, that's a curious name for a town. By the way, they call a tree dogwood, because it has so much bark, don't they? Ha, haw, haw! By George! that's good, eh, Elliot?"

The person addressed began to snore as though the atrocious pun had put him to sleep.

"Oh, by the way," said the drummer, reaching over and placing his hand on Len's shoulder, "you publish a paper, I believe."

"Yes."

"I am glad I met you. I have seen a lot of stuff copied from your paper, and I want to tell you that you are welcome to any of my gags. In St. Louis the newspaper men follow me around and take down what I say; don't they, Elliot?"

"I have heard you say so," Elliot replied.

"Oh, well, you know it's a fact. By George! it's as dark out there as an umbrella full of black cats in Egypt. What are you stopping for? Lost another member of the royal family?"

Both doors of the stage-coach were violently thrown open.

"Throw up your hands!" a deep voice demanded, and then a blinding flash from a dark lantern fell upon the passengers. The women shrieked, and for a moment there was such commotion that business was much retarded. Parker, the man of "gags," tried to crouch down under a shawl which some one had dropped.

"Stop howlin' an' come to bus'ness," said the man who had the dark lantern. "No use 'n tryin' ter whup the devil round the stump. What air you doin' down thar?" pulling the shawl off and revealing the cramped form of Mr. Parker. "Come, shell out!"

"I have nothing to shell," Len good-humoredly replied.

"Git out, all of you! This is too slow a way. Don't be frightened. We ain't goin' to hurt nobody."

The passengers, having recovered their self-possession, got out, and, as ordered, held up their hands.

"You are not a big prize; still, you are worth something these close-fisted times," the leading robber remarked as he relieved Len of three dollars in silver. "No watch, eh? Here's one," proceeding to relieve the whiskey-drummer of his timepiece. "You cheated me out of it the other night. Met you on a train in Missouri, you know."

Ned stood near Len, with one hand on his shoulder. One of the robbers came along, looked at her and tapped her under the chin, and, with a blow as quick as a flash of powder, Len knocked him down.

"What the devil air you doin'!" exclaimed the leader,

turning upon Len. "Another caper like that, and you'll regret it—ef you can."

"I don't object to givin' up what money I have," Len quietly replied; "but neither you nor your ruffians must take liberties with a lady whose protector I am proud to be."

"That's all right. Get back in the box. Wish you had as much money as you have grit. Bill, got the express package all right? Sorry we had to knock the driver off his seat. See if he's hurt much."

Some time elapsed before the coach started. The driver had been violently knocked from his box. Parker took out a sample bottle of his goods, induced the driver to drink,—not a difficult task, however,—and succeeded in so far restoring him that he was soon afterward able to gather up his lines and resume the journey.

"Parker," said Elliot, "will you please tell us what time it is?"

"Never mind," Parker replied; "I'll get that watch again, see if I don't."

"How will you get it?"

"I don't know exactly, but I'll get it again. I think I know that robber. He's a St. Louis pawn-broker. Mind what I tell you. Well, as the fellow said when he had nothing more to lose, we're safe now. How far are we from Catnip, Mr. Editor?"

"Catnip?"

"Yes, the place where—oh, beg your pardon, I mean Dogwood."

"We are now entering the suburbs."

"Glad."

After nearly an hour had passed Parker said, "Thought we were entering the suburbs of that fleeting village?"

"We are."

"Well, how far do the suburbs extend?"

"All over the country."

"Sorry."

Dogwood was thrown into a thrilling state of excitement immediately after the arrival of the stage. The sheriff summoned a posse and started in search of the robbers,—a useless exercise of horse-flesh. Justice, so long delayed, was slowly approaching, but not through the agency of the officers of the law.

XXXI.

THE sheriff and his posse returned, the usual reward was offered, and then there came that quiet, the profoundest of all quiet,—the quiet which follows an excitement in a cross-roads village.

"I don't feel very well to-day, and I have decided to give myself an extra allowance of exercise," Len remarked one morning, when, arriving at the office, he glanced at a distasteful task. "I shall probably be away all day, Ned, so I leave the office in your charge. If the fighting man from the head-waters should come in, tell him that Collins has agreed to attend to him."

"Where are you going?" the girl asked.

"I am going to stroll, it makes no difference in which direction. I feel that my future usefulness depends upon my going into the woods to-day."

Len wandered away, caring but little whither he went. Late in the afternoon, when he thought of returning, he was astonished upon realization that he had lost all idea of direction. "This is a pretty come off," he mused. "Can't take a walk without getting lost." He came upon a brook which he thought was one along whose banks he had walked an hour before; but, after pursuing it some time, he found that he was wrong. He sat down to rest, and, wearied with much exertion, dropped off to sleep. When he awoke the sun was setting. "This is getting to be serious," he said, as he resumed his devious journey. "If I don't come on

time grandpa will alarm the neighborhood. Helloa! yonder is a road. I know where I am now," he gladly exclaimed. "This is the Oak Hill road, but I am a long ways from home."

He walked along briskly. Evening insects began their grating songs, and a night-hawk, emancipated from the glaring eye of day, alighted on the dead snag of a tree and screamed in revenge.

"Helloa, what's this?" he said, stopping and taking up a piece of rope about fifteen feet in length. "Some man lost this off his hay-wagon," he added, noticing wisps of hay hanging on the branches above him, "and by this time is arraigning his ill-luck before a blue bar of profanity. I'll take it along. Can't afford to lose such an opportunity of proving to grandpa that I have an eye for the useful in life."

He quickened his pace as the darkness deepened. Sometimes the road wound among thick undergrowth, into those damp and gloomy places which impress the strongest heart with a sense of dread; then it seemed to crawl around a steep hillside, just able to find room to stretch itself. Just as Len reached a "cut," where one side of the road was bordered by high and detached rocks, he heard the sound of horses' hoofs, rattling along the flinty pass a short distance ahead of him. He stopped involuntarily and listened. The horses were approaching him. Moved by a sudden impulse—an impulse which he did not understand, but with which he did not stop to argue—he climbed up a short distance and stood behind a large rock that had rolled down from a cliff above. Scarcely had he taken his hidden stand when two horse-

men dashed around a bend in the road and stopped opposite him.

"Say," said one of the men, "I'll remain here until you ride out and meet the boys. Tell them three is no particular danger now, and that we will go back to Missouri to-morrow. Get back as soon as you can, for we have business before us."

These words were spoken in a low tone, but Len's eager ear caught every one of them. One of the men rode on as directed, the other remained in the road only a few feet from Len. "I think that my cow-boy experience will now serve me a good turn," Gansett mused, and instantly his fingers began to make a lariat of the rope. He was not in the least excited; his only feeling was of quiet exultation. "I can't miss him," he thought, "and if I succeed in getting the rope well down over his arms his weapons will be of no use to him."

"Whoa!" said the man, speaking to his horse. The animal, in reaching after the leaves of the vines growing in the scanty soil, had moved nearer the rock behind which Gansett was standing. "Whoa, I tell you!"

Len stood ready, but waited. He could plainly see the outlines of the horseman, but fancied that one of his hands was raised. Yes, it was. He had taken off his hat, and was passing one hand over his head.

Len noiselessly moved to one side, to give his arms more play, and, with a skill which a professional cattleman might have admired, threw the rope. Then, with his entire weight thrown against the rope, he sprang from behind the rock. The horse jumped; the man, uttering a loud cry, fell to the ground. The daring cap-

ture was effected in a moment. Len, without relaxing the rope, but following it hand over hand, soon reached his prisoner. The man did not stir after striking the ground. He was stunned, perhaps killed; but Gansett, determined to take no chances, wound the rope about the man, turned him over on his breast and tied his hands. His next move was an attempt to secure the horse, but the animal galloped away. Knowing that the riderless horse, should he be discovered by any of the gang, would spread alarm, Gansett dragged the insensible man down into the ravine. Then, straightening him out, he took two pistols from the outlaw's belt and laid them on the ground. The man groaned.

"You are coming around all right," said Len. "Who are you, anyway?"

No reply.

"If I only had a match I'd study your features awhile. Probably you've got one. Let me see. Yes, you are well provided."

Just as he was about to strike a match he heard the sound of hoofs, and, catching up the two pistols, he hurried back to the road and secreted himself. Two men galloped past. Len levelled one of the pistols and fired. The gallop was quickened into a wild dash, and then all was still.

"I don't think it is safe to strike matches in this neighborhood at present," he mused. "I think I'd better go back to my prisoner and wait a while."

When he returned he found that the outlaw had not changed his position, but that he exhibited signs of life by breathing heavily.

"Who are you?" Len again asked.

No reply.

Len sat down with his back against a tree and waited, but his anxiety to see the man's face became so strong that he became restless and impatient.

"I'll try one match, anyway."

He approached the prisoner, who lay on his back, and struck a match, but it fell from his trembling hand. He tried to calm himself, but could not. He thought of the foolishness of becoming excited after the dangerous work had been accomplished, but to no purpose. He struck another match. The man mumbled something, but Len paid no attention to him. The match blazed. Gansett held it near the man's face.

"Great God!" exclaimed the young man, dropping the match and springing to his feet. "Great God, it is Colonel Bently!"

Len, placing his hand against a tree, steadied himself for a moment, then slowly sank down, and buried his face in his hands. He broke out in a cold perspiration, and his frame shook as though seized with ague. The night wore away, still the silence was unbroken save by the night-hawk, which, realizing the near approach of the eye of day, screamed in revenge.

"Gansett," said the colonel, "untie me."

"No."

"Gansett, I appeal to your sense of gratitude, to your sympathy, to your humanity."

"No."

"Remember that you owe your happiness to me. I

placed you in your present position, and I kept Honeycut from forcibly marrying Miss Hobdy."

"No."

"Is it possible, Len, that I appeal to you in vain?"

"Yes. The Colonel Bently whom I knew, admired, loved, is in England. You are an outlaw, and perhaps a murderer."

"I swear that I am not."

"The devil swore that he was holy."

"You ought to be ashamed of your inhumanity—your cowardice. You lurk in the woods like a savage, and lasso a man like a sneak."

"And you ride in the woods like a thief, and rob people like a ruffian."

"I'll pay you for this. Come, Len, don't harden your heart against me. No matter how much of an outlaw I am, I have never done aught against you."

"Yes, you have," Len exclaimed, violently striking his breast. "You have injured me more than you have injured all your victims combined. You have shaken my faith in man. I have passed through many trials, but until I held a match over your face my faith in man remained unshaken. The robber and the assassin, the thief and the liar, all of whom I have seen, only strengthen my belief that there *did* exist a noblest work of God, but you—you have stabbed that ennobling faith."

"Gansett, you are too hard on me; so hard that you forget your obligations. Remember that the printing-office—"

"I don't owe you a cent. I have paid the last note."

"Very true, but the fact that I did not push you should inspire gratitude. Len, I cannot help but like you, cannot help admiring your manliness, but there is an honor, a manliness, that arises above all law. I now appeal to that honor and manliness and in the name of human friendship I ask you to untie me. I will leave this neighborhood, never to return. News shall come, stating that I died in England, and there shall also come a will bequeathing my farm and stage line to you. For God's sake, Len, do not turn away from me! Honeycut shall disappear, never to return, and you and the woman whom you love can live in—"

"By the way, colonel," Len interposed, "did you find much change in your old home? I fear that my letter will not reach you. Pity, too, for I told how much we all missed you, and how warm my friendship was. I told you many things that I could not tell during a conversation. The sun is fairly up. Will you walk to Dogwood with me, or shall I leave you here until I get a wagon?"

"I'll remain here."

"All right. Permit me to tie you more securely, and to gag you, lest you injure yourself by shouting."

"You are heartless, Gansett."

"Yes, quite so."

"I'll walk with you."

"Then I will untie your legs, but let your arms remain as they are."

"D—d wretch!" the colonel muttered.

"Yes, decidedly so. Ah, a happy thought! I'll drive

you as I would a calf, but if you become boisterous I'll shoot you as I would a dog."

When they reached Dogwood the people became much excited; but, to Len's surprise, Bently attempted no defence of himself. He was taken to jail and locked up, and, lest a rescue might be attempted, a strong guard was stationed around the house. Just as Len and the sheriff were turning away from the jail a man rode up and said, "Gentlemen, I've got a piece uv news. Las' night as Honeycut wuz ridin' erlong over here nigh Tar-rapin branch somebody shot him. He galloped away, an' didn't know he wuz hurt bad till he reached home. Ball sorter went in behind his shoulder, an' 'peered ter range round. Ther doctor don't think he'll live."

The sheriff, to whom Len had told his story, said, "Mr. Gansett, that powder wasn't wasted."

"No, I think not. Do you think that there is likely to be an attempt to liberate Bently?"

"Not by the citizens, for you see they air as hot as the devil ag'in him, but some o' the gang mout dash in. You've done noble work, and the reward—"

"I wouldn't touch a cent of it for the world."

"Wall, but it has to go to somebody. Me and the boys rid mighty hard—"

"You and the boys, then, may have the reward."

"Now you're talkin'. Look at the folks, will you? Oh, but they've got a sensation now that'll last 'em for a day or two. Helloa, Mr. Collins!" addressing the printer, who came forward. "We've got him, after all."

"So I hear. Mr. Gansett, if you want to say anything

about it in our next issue it is time to begin, specially as we are about out of copy."

"Collins, I don't know how to write it up. You do it. Say that he was captured by a man connected with the 'Picket,' but don't give any of the particulars."

"Let me interview the colonel?"

"Yes, Mr. Gansett," said the sheriff, "let us interview the colonel, and p'raps he'll tell how hard he had to ride to keep out of our way t'other night."

"Do as you think best, Collins," Len replied. "Has Miss Hobdy come yet?"

"Yes, sir," she's in the office. She's heard all about it."

Len hurried to the office. When he entered Ned burst into tears and threw her arms around his neck. "There, little girl, don't cry. It's all over."

"But I am not a little girl if I can reach up this way," pulling his head down and kissing him. "Sit down and tell me all about it."

He related his story. Her eyes sparkled and her breathing grew faster. "You are the bravest and smartest man in the world," she said when he had concluded. "By the way, I had to tell a little story for you. I told your grandpa that you might not be home until late, and then, I don't know why, I said you would probably be away all night."

News spreads rapidly in the country. Men who are the slowest on the farm are sometimes the fastest on the road. Old Bob and his wife met Len at the gate. They were much excited, particularly Mrs. Gansett, who loudly thanked the Lord that her grandson was safe. At the

breakfast-table Len gave a detailed account of his adventure.

"Bob," said Mrs. Gansett, as she seized a peach-tree branch and vigorously waved off the flies, "didn't I tell you that the colonel wouldn't do? Hah, didn't I tell you?"

"Well, now, Sarah, I don't 'zactly recollect whether—"

"Yes, you do, an' you know it. Don't you know one evenin' when Len went home with him, I said I didn't like the idea? Yes, you do know it. I have allus had my suspicions o' that man, an' I knowed jes' as well as I ever knowed anythin' that he would come to some bad eend. It's a mighty easy matter to fool yo' grandpa, Len, but it's hard to fool me. I knowed it—knowed it as well as anythin' that thar was suthin' wrong with that man. I reckon—fetch take the flies, they stick so; it mus' sho'ly be goin' to rain—the next time you'll all pay attention to what I say."

XXXII.

THE excitement throughout the neighborhood became more and more intense. The people, realizing that their social leader had fallen, bitterly meditating the length of time they had been duped by him, surrendered themselves to that condition of fury which is the sprouting-ground, the planted, of mob violence; but the good sense of a few old men, and notably the good sense of Bob Gansett, restrained a general demand for vengeance. The prosecuting attorney of the district soon arrived. He called at the "Picket" office, and, during a conversation with Len, said:—

"You have undoubtedly accomplished a good piece of work, but you ran a great risk. In truth, you did not act very wisely. Any number of honest men—fox-hunters—ride through the woods at night, and while your stepping behind the rock proves to be fortunate, yet you did not hear the men say enough to convince you that they were indeed robbers."

"That is a fact," Len replied. "I acknowledge that I was rash."

"And again," continued the prosecuting attorney, "when you went back to the road, upon hearing the sound of hoofs you fired at two men, who might have been a physician and some one who had been hurriedly sent after him."

"Great Cæsar, man!" Len exclaimed; don't make me out to be a fool."

"Of course not; but these facts will be far from comforting when the counsel for the defence enlarges upon them, especially so if the defendants invent a clever story, which they will evidently do."

"A clever story amounts to but little in the face of a fact. I have a letter from Bently, purporting to have been written in England, and—"

"Yes," said the prosecuting attorney, nodding in ironical approval; "but you must know that the colonel could reach this neighborhood quite as soon as the letter."

"That's a fact, but I don't believe he has been to England."

"Of course not; but don't you know that the letter is against us, proving that the colonel was abroad when a certain robbery was committed?"

"I hadn't thought of that."

"I suppose not. Now, Mr. Gansett, you'd better destroy that letter."

"No, I shall keep it."

"But I tell you that they will use it against us."

"All right; let them use it."

"I say no."

"I say yes, for I do not intend to throw a single obstacle in the colonel's way."

"Mr. Gansett, you are certainly a very hot-headed and impulsive young man."

"Well, I can't help it."

"Oh, yes, you can help it. Have you seen the fellow you shot?"

"No, not since he passed me like the flying shadow of a wolf."

"Sentiment," said the prosecuting attorney, biting off a chew of tobacco. "Sentiment and law, though, are like castor-oil and rose-water,—won't mix. Let us go over and see—what's his name?"

"Who, Honeycut?"

"Yes, and take a justice of the peace with us to attest his confession."

"How do you know he will confess?"

"Oh, he must; that's all."

Accompanied by a magistrate, they went to Honeycut's house, a small cabin situated on a rugged hillside about a mile from Bently's house. The wounded man, cared for by the family who lived in the house, did not appear to be in immediate danger; but the prosecuting attorney, who took care not to reveal his connection with the law, but who slyly intimated that he was a skilled surgeon from a distant town, soon convinced Honeycut that his case was hopeless.

"Mr. Culp," said Len, addressing the lawyer, "let me see you outside a moment." When Culp had followed him, Gansett added, "I don't want you to take any advantage of that fellow."

"Now, look here, my dear sir, for God's sake don't make a fool of yourself! I tell you that sentiment and law won't mix."

"It is not so much sentiment as it is justice that—"

"Yes, I know all about that. Let me tell you something. I strongly suspect that Mr. Honeycut murdered a man in this county some years ago; in fact, he has

muttered certain words that lead to this belief. Suppose he gets well and is convicted of robbery? He will be sent to the penitentiary for a few years, and—”

“You are right,” said Len.

“Of course I am. Just come in and keep quiet.”

Honeycut became very restless. He was much frightened, and when Culp took a small Bible from his pocket, and began to read a passage luridly descriptive of hell, the wretch groaned aloud.

“I am not a preacher,” said Mr. Culp, “but I have been taught by good men that there is a way of avoiding this place, no matter how dark a crime a man may have committed. It is an awful thing, my dear Mr. Honeycut, to be hurled into eternity without having prepared yourself. Oh, if you desire to die with a dark stain on your mind, all right,” he added, as Honeycut turned his face away.

“I don’t want to die that way.”

“It appears that you do.”

“But I don’t, I tell you.”

“That may be, but you are going to put it off till it’s too late.”

“No, I ain’t nuther.”

“Then why don’t you tell me that you murdered a man?”

“Who said I did?”

“Well, that’s all right. Men sometimes talk in their sleep.”

“Yas, an’ they sometimes tell lies in their sleep.”

“But more often when they are awake,” the lawyer added.

“How long do you think I’ll live?”

"Perhaps until this evening."

Honeycut groaned. "Look here," said he, "er lawyer that Colonel Bently sent over here told me not to say nothin' ter nobody."

"Of course that lawyer is much more interested in his fee than he is in your soul."

"I don't know erbout that. Gansett, what did you come here fur? To see me die?"

"Not particularly."

"Yas, like hell yer didn't. See er man ridin' 'long ther road at night an' shoot him fur nuthin'. Yer ought ter be hung fur it."

"How do you know I shot you?"

"Never mind; I know all erbout it, but I won't say nuthin'."

The lawyer, turning to the justice of the peace, said, in an undertone, but loud enough for Honeycut to hear: "Did that nigger say he'd have the grave ready in time?"

"Yes; he's at work on it now."

"Reckon, then, it will be ready."

"What did you say?" Honeycut asked.

"Nothing," the lawer replied.

"Yas, yer did," he moaned. "Said suthin' erbout er grave."

"Well, to tell you the truth, your grave is being dug, and by this time they are smoothing down your lowly pillow. Ready to go, gentlemen?"

"Hold on," said Honeycut. His voice had become weak and his breath was difficut. "I don't want er thiser way."

"Don't do it. Put your faith in the great Pleader for man—in the great Forgiver of sin."

"I did kill a man wunst."

"Yes?"

"But I'm sorry fur it."

"What was his name?"

"Jim Buck. Him an' Hobdy had had some trouble, an' he wanted me ter go in with him an' kill Hobdy. I said I would, but airtwards backed out. Then he said ef I didn't help him he'd norate it round that I got up the scheme. This skeered me, an' I thought the bes' thing I could do wuz ter kill Buck, so one day I followed him an' killed him. I sarched his pockets arter he fell an' found er note that Hobdy had writ him. I jes' could spell it out, but I seed how 'portant a dockymment it wuz. Pretty soon I seed Hobdy er-comin', an' I hid, an' then come out on him when he stopped ter look at Buck."

"What about your connection with the robberies that have been committed in this State and Missouri?"

"I oughten ter say nothin' erbout that, fur it consarns somebody else."

"Wall, I went in with ther colonel. He wuz sich a good friend ter me that I told him that I killed Buck. Then he had me. Ther stage-driver an' er feller named Price wuz in ter it too."

The confession was written by the justice of the peace—who, strange to say, could write legibly—and was signed by Honeycut.

"Now we are all right," said the lawyer, as the party set out for Dogwood. "The confession fixes everything. Let us take a short cut if there is one, for I've got con-

siderable work to do to-day. Gansett, I have been solicited to run for judge at the next election, and I'd like your support. Those who know me best say that I am well qualified for the place, and, to tell you the truth, I believe that I am. I understand the law, and I think that I know what justice is. Helloa, who is the gentleman?"

"His name is Braley," Len replied.

"Hy, gentlemen," said Mr. Braley, approaching and placing a tow sack on a log. The party stopped, and the lawyer was introduced to the champion log-roller.

"What have you in your sack, Braley?" Len asked.

"Er middlin' uv meat, that I got over at Bradshaw's. He'p'd him to fix up his gin t'other day, an' he told me when I wanted anythin' ter let him know, an' this mornin' wife she 'lowed that we'd better have er little meat; so I went over and got some. Now ain't that awful erbout the col'n? I didn't speck no better, nur hardly ez good, uv Honeycut, but I wuz mighty s'pized erbout the col'n. Wife she 'lowed that it wuz putty much ther way with all ther men, an' when I told her that it wa'n't ther way with me she 'lowed that I wan't ernuff ercount ter rober man. Which way yer been?"

"Been over to see Mr. Honeycut," the lawyer replied.

"Yas, ther son uv—wall, I don't talk erbout no man when he's down flat uv his back. Mr. Gansett, I've allus sorter b'l'eved that he had suthin' ter do with whalin' Mort Haney, an' I bet yer ef Mort had thought it ez straung thar would er been some music in ther neighborhood. Wall, wall, Mr. Gansett, wusht I'd been with yer ther night yer fotch 'em ter taw. Good-by, gentlemen,"

he added, taking up his sack. "Reckon ther chillun's haungry by this time,—never seed chillun that hankered so airter meat,—an' I reckon I'd better be shovin'."

When they reached Dogwood the lawyer said: "Gansett, I am going to see the sheriff and get him to have Honeycut closely guarded. And, by the way, I am going to call on the colonel. I don't suppose I can get him to make a confession, but I can upset some of his plans."

About an hour afterward the sheriff called at the "Picket" office, and informed Len that the colonel wanted to see him. Len went immediately to the jail.

"Gansett," said the colonel, "sit down." His face was haggard and his eyes were hollow, but his voice was cheerful, nor had his manner lost any of its cordiality.

"How are you getting along, Len?"

"Very well."

"Have you relented toward me?"

"I was deeply wounded, but the wound is healing."

"Will it leave a scar?"

"One which time cannot efface."

"I know how you feel, and I do not blame you. Len, there are some men that are made of a strong mixture of good and bad. Within them there is a constant struggle between the two elements. I am one of those men,—so moulded and so directed by the hand of fate. I will tell you truthfully—for the disposition to lie is not uppermost in my nature—that I honor you, think more of you than of any man I have ever met. I have robbed—"

"Colonel," Len broke in, lifting his hands in imploration, "I did not ask you for a confession. You know how I have revered you, how I regarded you as my model

of manhood. Tell me nothing that reflects upon yourself. Let me look back at you—let me forget that—”

“I am a criminal?”

“Yes.”

“But you cannot forget it, my dear boy. I am now engaged in writing a statement, which at the proper time shall be placed into your hands. I shall not spare myself.”

“If it be intended to sting me, to still lower you in my mind, I will not read it.”

“You shall read it. You surely will not refuse me so slight a request.”

“Oh colonel, I now wish that I had released you!”

“No, it is better as it is. I could not have much longer escaped justice, and it is better that a friend, rather than an enemy, should lay the hand of retribution upon me.”

“I don’t understand how a man so universally esteemed, so noble in many respects, and so able intellectually, could resort to lawlessness.”

“I do not understand either, Gansett. The adventure, the excitement of robbery, was necessary to my life. I am two men.”

“I wish I had never known but one of you.”

“And I wish there had been but one of me. So Honeycut has made a confession?”

“Yes.”

“I am glad of it, for if ever a man deserved to be hanged he is the man. There is one thing I can say: Len, I have never shed human blood.”

“I am glad to know that.”

"You mean that you are glad to hear it, even though you cannot believe me."

"But I do believe you."

"Thank you, my dear boy! I am glad that you do not think me the worst man in the world. When I go to the penitentiary you must come down and see me. I have, for many years, hoped that the time when I could write a moral book for boys would come, and I think the opportunity is near at hand."

"You may not be sent to the penitentiary."

"Nonsense, my dear boy!"

"You may escape."

"Will you aid me?"

Len arose and walked about the room. "No," he said, "I cannot aid you."

"You are right, but if you know of others aiding—"

"Don't say another word. I must know nothing."

"I wish I had been born with a nature like yours."

"Perhaps you were born with a better nature than mine."

"No, for when I was a child I caught many glimpses of my future life. Sometimes I have thought that I was insane; but then, when mounted on a swift horse, galloping through the gloom of night, I have felt my spirit bound with delight and have felt my mind growing clearer and clearer as I sped along. Gansett, do not go so soon."

Len had rapped on the bars of the door. "Yes, I must go to the office."

"I have a great favor to ask."

"Name it."

"For the Lord's sake, keep Dockery away from here."

"I'll do so. I'll speak to his wife, and she will settle him."

XXXIII.

Two days later, and before Len had again called on Bently, the paper which the colonel declared he was preparing was placed on Len's desk. The contents were as follows:—

MY DEAR LEN—It is not my purpose to tire you with a long account of myself, and, above all, it is not my intention to degrade myself. I make this assertion at the outset, lest you throw the manuscript aside. I was born near Boston, Mass., in the year 1839. My father was a lawyer of large practice, and was a stern, though just, man. My mother was the soul of gentleness, and I used to think that my father was not tender enough in addressing her, for his words were often harsh. It was my mother's ambition that I should enter the ministry; but my father, who could not tolerate doctrines and creeds, not only discouraged the idea, but swore that I should be a lawyer. When I was about fifteen years old my only sister ran away and married a man whom my father disliked. Father swore that she should never again enter his house. Several years later, when sister's husband died, leaving her penniless, he allowed her to come home, and, though she continued to live with us, he never spoke to her again. I went into the law office, and for a time tried to overcome my dislike of the business; but what at first was distasteful, after a while became positively loathing. I had been in the office two years when my mother died. I never entered the office again after her death, but ran away, and, after many hardships, secured a position on a weekly newspaper. My father came to take me away. He seemed gentler than I had ever known him to be, and while persuading me to come home said, "Son, you need not study law unless you

want to. How would you like a position in a bank?" I replied that such a position would suit me. "I have already secured one," said he, "and your success in life now depends upon your honesty and efficiency." The work in the bank was congenial, and at the age of twenty-three I was given the position of cashier. From the first I was surprised to see the affairs of the bank conducted in so loose a manner, and noticed, with peculiar interest, that the books were not overhauled. I possessed the confidence of every man connected with the institution, and viewing this with pride, and thirsting for more popularity, caused the pernicious seeds of hypocrisy to be scattered within my breast. I became an active church-member, and took great interest in Sunday-schools. I knew that I was a hypocrite, and knowing it caused me to hold myself above honest people, whom I knew felt the love of Christ. All this time I was gradually stealing—I can think of no better term—small sums of money, and the fact that the irregularities were not discovered gave me additional courage. Of course this could not long continue. A man always increases, but never decreases, his system of robbery, and at last I departed, taking nearly \$100,000. My father made good the shortage, so a newspaper informed me, and less than two months later the old gentleman died, leaving no property. After this I traveled under an assumed name, visiting nearly all the noted cities of the world. I gradually lost interest in what I saw, and decided to do something. The opportunity was not long delayed. An Englishman, a Frenchman, and myself betook ourselves to the Alps and became robbers. After six months the enterprise proved disastrous, especially so to my companions, who, while in the discharge of their "duty," were shot and killed. I escaped, and as the atmosphere of that country had become rather oppressive, I went to South America, then to Texas, and, finally, to the neighborhood of Abbott's Ford, Arkansas, where I resumed my real name, with the addition of

colonel, which military prefix, in view of my Alpine experience, I thought was due me.

I had but little money left after buying my farm and stage-line. At first I did not intend to be aught but a good citizen—to live among the books of which I was fond; but the spirit of adventure, that something which assists in making two men of me, urged me to again become a robber. At one time I thought that Dockery might be a valuable man, and with an idea of converting him to my unholy cause I assisted him with his newspaper; but I soon found that he was weak and unstable,—a dangerous man in whom to confide. When I met you I was so struck with you that I centred my hopes on you, but to save my life—*notwithstanding* the fact that we became such fast friends—I could not broach the subject. I have made appointments with you, having sworn to myself that I would unfold my plans, but when the time came I could not speak. There was something about you that sealed my lips. You doubtless remember the time I told you of my suspicions with regard to Honeycut. I wanted Honeycut to get into my house and be captured—or killed—so that the excitement would spur me up to the point which I had endeavored to reach, but you frustrated the design by meeting the fellow in the yard. I had an arrangement with him to slip into my house about midnight. You suspected Honeycut of complicity in the Mort Haney whipping affair. Your suspicions were just. Honeycut and I whipped Mr. Haney—did it because he had become a little too free in expressing himself.

In addition to my stage-line, and as an almost necessary adjunct to my business, I owned a half interest in a St. Louis pawn-shop. In this way watches and finger-rings were rendered useful. This is the cause of my pretended visit to England: I had begun to fear you. Sometimes when you would look at me I could not help but think that you could read me; so, to convince you that I was in a

foreign country at the time of a certain robbery, I left the neighborhood. The letter which you received was written in my house, dated in advance, sent to an acquaintance of mine in London and re-mailed.

I have just heard that Price and the stage-driver have been captured in Missouri, and as they are wanted in that State the authorities here are not likely, for several years at least, to have dealings with them.

Well, I don't know that I have anything else to say. I have told you pretty much all about myself without going into tiresome details. Sometimes I hardly know what to think of myself, and after every long meditation I am forced to the conclusion that I have been following a course pointed out for me. I cannot shake off a Calvinistic belief which has taken hold of me—a belief which tells me that the good and bad cannot be materially changed. Rascals, like poets, are born, and though bad blood runs in families, yet a black sheep is often born in the whitest flock. I hope that you will remember my good qualities, and, with the gentle hand of kindness, cover up in your memory my evil deeds. I know that I have greatly shocked your belief in the honesty and uprightness of man, but the shock—though perhaps not so violent—had to come sooner or later. Honesty among men is much more rare than virtue among women, and nine times out of ten the deepest rascal is the most plausible talker; for, knowing that much of his success depends upon his address, he cultivates the faculty of convincing assertion.

If anything should occur to prevent me from making a more formal disposition of the property which I call mine, please show this paragraph, namely, that I hereby will all my effects to the county, and that I direct, as nearly as possible, the refunding of every cent I have taken from the traveling public. There will, of course, be many fraudulent claims; but in regard to such claims the best possible judgment, whatever that may be, must be exercised.

Yours,

BENTLY.

When Len had finished the manuscript he took it to Ned, placed it upon her "case," and said:—

"This is something that will interest you."

"What beautiful writing! Oh," turning to the last page, "it is from Colonel Bently!"

Len stood near her until she had finished reading; then, as she rearranged the manuscript, he asked:—

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know. What a strange man!"

"What do you think of his philosophy?"

"I do not know enough of the world to correctly estimate it. I hope, though, that it is not true. What do you think of it?"

"I fear that much of it is true."

XXXIV.

HONEYCUT improved rapidly,—so rapidly, in fact, that he was soon removed to the jail. He and the colonel were separated by iron bars so far apart that Honeycut could thrust his head into Bently's apartment. The wretched fellow spent most of his time sitting on his straw bed, bemoaning and cursing his stupidity.

"W'y, damn my fool soul," he said; "I oughter had better sense than ter turn myself wrong side out'ard jist beca'se that feller wanter me ter. Wish I had him by ther neck."

"He'll have you by the neck before long," the colonel rejoined.

"Whut ther devil yer wanter talk thater way fur, hah?"

"Merely to impress you—"

"Impress ther devil!"

"That's what I'm trying to do."

"You air as bad as I am, ever' bit 'n' grain."

"The judge and jury will settle that question."

"You know that yer got me inter ther robbin' bus'-ness."

"But you had committed murder before I ever saw you."

"I killed er man, but I done it in self-defence. Never mind, when I git outen here, I'll settle with Gansett. I'd er done it long 'go, but you wouldn't let me. Say, now, in earnest, do yer think they're goin' to hang me?"

"I don't see why they shouldn't."

"Blamed ef yer soul wouldn't rattle in a mustard-seed."

"And yours would find ample room to lie at full length on the point of a cambric needle. I don't see why the authorities wanted to afflict me with your presence. I am bad enough, God knows, but I shudder when I look at you."

"Who is that?" Honeycut exclaimed, as he heard the front door grate on its hinges. "Blamed ef it ain't ole Hobdy!"

Hobdy walked along the corridor until he was opposite Honeycut, then, taking hold of the bars, he looked at Honeycut, and said:—

"Ken I do anythin' fur yer? How would er fried chicken strike yer? Must be putty hard on er wounded man ter be shet up thiser way."

"I want you to go on erway from here, Hobdy, an' leave me erlone; that's what I want," Honeycut exclaimed.

"Now, here, I didn't come ter torment yer. No matter how mean er man has been ter me, I allus feel sorry fur him when he's in er bad fix."

"Wall, yer needn't be sorry fer me. You air a ole coward, ur yer'd a-killed me long 'go."

"That's er bad way ter talk, Mr. Honeycut."

"I talk as I damn please."

"All right; I ain't ther man ter pester yer. W'y, thar's ther col'n. How's yer health, col'n?"

"I am not feeling well, Mr. Hobdy. Am threatened with fever, I think."

"Hope not, an' mo'n that, I hope yer'll come out all right. Cou't meets termor' an' I hear 'em say they are goin' ter take up Honeycut's case the fust one."

"That's none uv your damned business," Honeycut growled.

"Not in perticuler, that's er fack. Wall, col'n, I wush yer mighty well."

The next day Honeycut was arraigned before court. He pleaded not guilty,—the same plea he had previously set up before a justice of the peace,—but could prove nothing. His confession, together with Hobdy's testimony, left no doubt of his conviction. The jury, without leaving the box, rendered a verdict of guilty. Honeycut betrayed no emotion, but, discharging a mouthful of tobacco-juice, nodded at Hobdy, and said:—

"The devil will git yer fur this."

"Yas," the old man replied; "but it 'pears like he's goin' ter git somebody else fust."

Honeycut did not seem to realize his situation until sentence was pronounced. Then he sank down on a bench, where he remained until the sheriff led him away. He was given two weeks' time during which to prepare for death. Murray, the circuit rider, called upon him.

"Mr. Honeycut," said he, "are you sorry for what you have done?"

"Yas, sir."

"You realize that your soul is in danger of being sent to torment, do you not?"

"Yas, I reckon so."

"Are you repentant enough—do you realize that the Saviour's blood is all that can save man?"

"Yas; an' ef I b'l'ave that, I'll go to heaven won't I?"

The minister arose, looked at the brute, and said, "Perhaps I am too honest to engage in this sort of business. God knows that I would not seek to throw a stumbling-block in the way of any man, but I do not think that it is my duty to encourage you. Heaven is the abode of the gentle and noble children of man, and not for the murderer. I bid you good-morning."

When it became known that Murray had refused to give a spiritual prescription to Honeycut many women were horrified, but when he had preached a sermon in defence of himself he stood forth acquitted of the charge of inhumanity. Honeycut secured another preacher, a shouting old fellow who had long been silenced by conference, on account of a charge, a little too well founded, declaring that the "unreverend" gentleman had pulled down a fence, and had driven his hogs into another man's cornfield. This man prayed and shouted, and, in the language of Mort Haney, rubbed Honeycut down until he was in good training.

One Thursday evening, while Len was strolling near the village, he came upon a party of men engaged in erecting a scaffold. One of them, Mr. Braley, threw down his saw, shook hands with Len, and said:—

"Been livin' here a mighty long time, an' this is the fust work I've ever got outen ther county. The sheriff axed me how much I'd charge, an' I told him—hurry up thar, boys, fur we've got ter finish it ter-day—told him that I didn't know. He 'lowed that money wuz

scarce, but said that ef I done ther work well he'd give me ernuff meat ter do me three munt's. Don't b'l'ever he knows whut er contract he's un'ertook. Hurry up, men! Andy, saw off ther eend uv that beam. That's it. Spence, ef them nails ain't big ernuff take them other ones."

—The next day Dogwood was crowded with people from all over the country. Early at morning Dockery took a position near the jail, and would, doubtless, have occupied the place until the procession was formed had not his wife ordered him away. Honeycut and old Billy Winn, the preacher, continued to pray until the sheriff informed them that the time was up. The criminal was placed in a cart. He was pale, but was not excited—had that dazed expression peculiar to the victims of the gallows. He had to be assisted up the steps of the scaffold, and when he stepped forward in response to the question, "Have you anything to say?" his knees shook.

"I ain't got much ter say that'll int'rest these here folks," he said. "I killed Buck, an' I'm goin' ter suffer fur it. I am ready—ready ter die, fur I b'l'ever my sins have been wiped out."

His neck was not broken by the fall, and he died a slow and horrible death.

As Len and his grandfather turned away from the place, the old man remarked: "This is awful, but he brought it on himself. It is a mighty hard matter to dodge the jedgment o' the Lord."

CONCLUSION.

COLONEL BENTLY was seized with a virulent type of fever. On the day of the execution of Honeycut the colonel was delirious, but the next day—his mind being temporarily clear—he sent for Len.

"I haven't much to say," he said. "I know that I am going to die, and I did not want to die without seeing you again. I cannot with Julian say that I die without remorse, as I have lived without reproach, but I shall do the best I can under the circumstances. Strange as it may seem to you, Len, I am not afraid to die. I cannot believe that there are future glories laid up for me; but somehow I am willing to leave it all to the one who has had the shaping of my life. I know that this is a dangerous doctrine to teach to those who would take the advantage of it by attributing all their shortcomings to Fate, yet I cannot help but believe it. Honeycut was hanged, they tell me."

"Yes."

"How did he stand it?"

"Acted his part very well."

"Wish you'd chip me off a piece of that ice. Every time I think of that fellow I want ice. Probably it is because I think he has gone to such a warm place. Thank you," he added, as he took the ice. "Great Lord, how my blood burns! Nobody can live in this damp place. Look," he said, with a smile, "how it affected Honeycut's health,"

"Colonel, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, Gansett. Yes, come and see me often, that is, when I am myself. If I am delirious when you call, don't come in. Did I put that ice in my trunk?"

"It is in your hand."

"That's true, but I thought I had locked it up and sent it away. You'd better leave me, Len."

Bently grew worse day by day, and a physician who had come from a distance said that recovery was impossible. His words were verified. One night, while a violent storm was blowing, while the frightened inhabitants of Dogwood were momentarily expecting to see their houses blown away, the summons came. Len and his grandfather were in the cell at the time. The lamp-light flickered, the storm roared.

"Is that a stage-coach running away?" the colonel asked in a weak voice.

"It is the wind," Len replied.

"It has come to blow my soul away."

The light went out. Len struck a match, and by its glare he saw that the man was dead.

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The day was beautiful. The leaves were in the glowing brown of maturity, and the streams, after the fierce heat of summer, seemed to leap with brighter life. Untrained, but musical, voices sang in a little church. It was Len and Ned's wedding-day. Everybody in the neighborhood was present, not in the church,—for it was too small,—but were gathered about it. Just before

the ceremony was over, one man, addressing an acquaintance, said:—

“Goin’ ter have suthin’ ter eat somewhar on the ground, I reckon. My folks ain’t no hands fur nick-nacks. What they want is meat, an’ er plenty uv it. Reckon they’ll have fresh meat here ’stead uv middlin’s. Wall, it don’t make much difference with me so it’s meat. Excuse me a minute. There’s my wife standing over yonder, and I don’t want her to see me. She’s one of the finest creatures,—she sees me, and I’ve got to go.”

Among those who pressed forward to congratulate Len was Parker, the whiskey-drummer, who had just arrived.

“Glad to see you,” said Parker. “Told you I’d get my watch again. Got it, yes, sir, got it. Hear you are going north on a bridal tour. Would like to go along, but have got business in this part of the country. Printer named Collins going to run your paper while you are gone, I believe? Well, whenever I come around I’ll help him out. I’ve got a fine line of gags on hand.”

The wedding tour, necessarily economical, was not an extended one. On the return trip the train was so delayed that the stage was gone when Len and his wife reached Oak Hill.

“I hope we shall not be compelled to stay at that miserable little hotel,” said Ned.

“We won’t. I’ll hire some one to take us over in a wagon.”

A wagon was secured. “Do you know anything about the Abbott’s Ford neighborhood?” Len asked as they drove along.

"Not much," the driver replied.

"Don't know, then, whether or not anything has happened within the last two weeks?"

"No."

They met no one,—did not go through Dogwood, but drove straight home. When they got out at the gate old man Gansett came to meet them. Tears were rolling down his face. He did not speak, but leading Len and Ned into the orchard, he pointed to a fresh mound and said, "Your gran'ma."

When they had entered the house the old man said: "She wasn't sick long, an' I hope that I'll go as she did. Don't let me worry you, my dear children. This is a gloomy place, but I can't help it. Don't pay any attention to me."

Ned put her arms around the old man's neck. "Grandpa," she said, "you must know that God's will is best. She was prepared to go home, and when she went she found her house in order."

"God bless you, my darling! God bless you!" he sobbed. "You air an angel, if there ever was one."

The next morning, Ned, addressing her husband, remarked, "Some time ago you promised that after we were married I might go to the office with you every day and help you edit the paper. Nothing could give me more pleasure, but I cannot go and leave grandpa alone."

"Ned, you are not only the sweetest, but the best girl that ever lived. Has grandpa told you of a certain plan he has laid out?"

"No."

"Perhaps he wants to surprise you."

"Please tell me, and I'll promise to be just as much surprised when he tells me."

"Oh, you charming little hypocrite! He has rented the little house where your father lives."

"What for?"

"To keep your father from renting it."

"But what will become of dad?"

"He is to come here and live with us."

"There," exclaimed Ned, "grandpa is calling me. Run along to your work now, and be a good boy."

Shortly after he had reached the office, and while he was talking to Collins, Dockery rushed in and greeted him with a demonstration that was almost violent.

"Sit down, Dockery; sit down. Glad to see you. How are you getting along?"

"First-class."

"How is your paper?"

"My dear boy," said the Honorable Mangus Dockery, the 'Eagle of Freedom' is—is—I might say, no more, or, in more classic language, has ceased to shriek."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"Oh, no, say, rather, that you congratulate me. My wife came to the conclusion, and I heartily concurred with her, that we'd better sell out; so we sold the plant—"

"The sprout, you mean," Collins suggested.

"Never mind, Cap'n Collins, I know what I am talking about. Sold the plant to a fellow who has moved it off somewhere. We—I speak of my wife and myself—have opened a small grocery store. Here's our business

card. Whenever you want anything in our line give us a call. Well, sir, you do not know what a relief it is to get out of the harness. I have always known that I had commercial talents, and I have often believed that I was wrong in throwing away my time in a calling which demands so little serious thought."

"Do you keep the books?"

"Well, no; my wife does that."

"You are the salesman, I suppose?"

"Well, not exactly. You see, after consulting with my wife, I thought it better to spend the most of my valuable time in working on a piece of land we have rented, preparatory to the production of vegetables upon which we can live without drawing upon our other resources. I am now in my working garb, having just come over from the field; and, by the way, if you should see my wife soon, don't mention the fact that I came over from the field, for she might not like it because I did not go home first and render myself more presentable. Remarkably neat woman, Gansett; remarkably neat! Well, I must be getting back."

As Mr. Dockery went out he spoke to two men who were coming in. The two men were Braley and Mort Haney. After cordial greeting they sat down and began to tell Len how much everybody had missed him.

"Big changes have happened here sense you fust come," said Haney.

"I wuz jist er-thinkin' erbout that," remarked Braley.

"Yes," Len replied, "several changes have occurred."

"We're goin' ter have a railroad putty soon," said Haney.

"I wuz jist a-goin' ter tell him that," remarked Braley.

"Yes," Len replied. "They have already begun work, and before many months trains will be running through this place."

"Railroads, I reckon, air mighty good things," observed Braley; "but I've hearn that they do bring up ther price uv meat might'y. Hear 'em say that 'fo' ther railroad went to Oak Hill yer could buy middlin's fur er little ur nothin', but that yer kain't hardly git 'em now fur love nur money."

"How are you off fur meat now, Braley?" Len asked.

"Well, I'll jest tell yer how it is with me. When I left home this mornin' wife she 'lowed ef I didn't fetch er middlin' ^{back} when I come it wouldn't be good for me; but I ain't made the raise uv nairy one yit."

"You are going by my house, are you not?" Len asked.

"Oh, yas, I ken go by anywhar."

"Here," said Len, after writing on the reverse side of a proof-sheet, "this is an order for as much meat as you can carry."

"Much erbleeged, Mr. Gansett; much erbleeged. B'l'ave I'll jog on out thater way now. Haney, ready to shove? Well, come on then. Say, Mr. Gansett, whenever yer want any work done, don't furgit ter let me know. I ken do it better 'n anybody else, and it sha'n't cost yer er cent, nuther,"

Old man Hobdy was delighted at the prospect of living with the Gansetts. "Didn't know I'd ever live in sich er fine house," he said, gazing at the rough logs and rougher stones of the old building; "but er man don't know one day what's goin' ter come ther next."

October mellowed into November, the crowning glory of an Arkansas year. In the evening Len and his wife would walk along the shore of the beautiful river, and in the twilight they sang old songs. Old man Gansett rarely smiled. His vigor was gone, but in the evening he walked, not along the river, but in the old orchard where his wife was buried. One evening, when Len was with him, he pointed to an apple-tree above Mrs. Gansett's grave, and said:—

“Me an’ your gran’ma set out that tree many years ago. For a long time now it has had fewer an’ fewer apples on it ever’ year, an’ this year it only had two. They growed clost together way up at the top, an’ the day your gran’ma was buried one o’ them fell off. There’s the other one up there now.”

“Do you want me to get it for you?” Len asked.

“No, let it stay.”

One morning the old man did not come to breakfast. He said that he felt too bad to eat anything. A physician who was immediately summoned, said that Mr. Gansett had pneumonia. A few days later, on a calm and beautiful day, his body was tenderly borne out into the old orchard. Just as the coffin was lowered, an apple fell from the top of a tree and rolled into the grave.

A railroad now passes through Dogwood, and though it may affect the price of “middlin’s,” yet it is a great advantage to the general public. The old Gansett house has undergone no change, and in the evening, when the weather is fine, Len and his wife walk along the shore of the beautiful river.

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